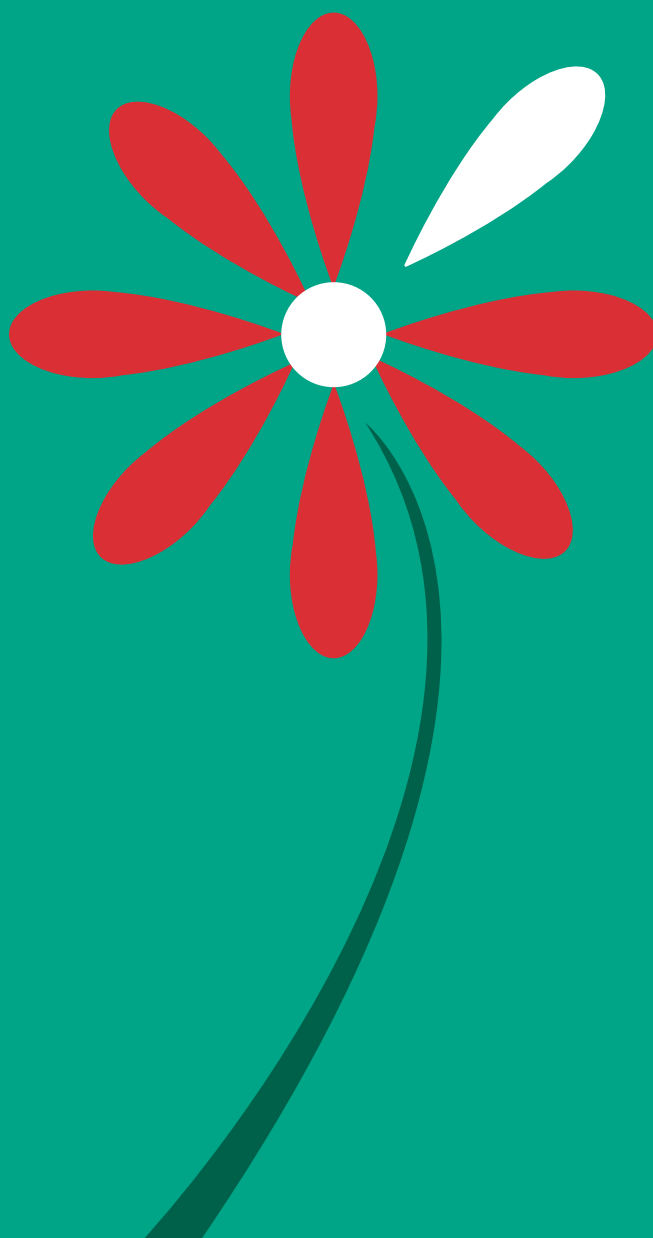


# Developing Facilitation Skills

## *A Handbook for Group Facilitators*

Patricia Prendiville



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A Handbook for Group Facilitators

By Patricia Prendiville

# Acknowledgements

Since *Developing Facilitation Skills* was first printed in 1995, it has been used extensively by a very wide range of people who wanted to develop, enhance and expand their facilitation skills. It is a great delight to know that the book is still relevant, useful and meeting the need for which it was intended.

Many thanks to all the users and readers of the book for their feedback and acknowledgement.

A special word of thanks and appreciation to the trainers in Meitheal who have worked with the material and made it a live tool of learning and development. They are: Catherine Dowling; Marie Harding; Annette Halpin; Mick Scully; Conor Rowley, and Anne Troy. Fran Keyes and Joan Mooney, both former trainers with Meitheal, also contributed to the book's use and application by many people developing their facilitation skills.

This revised text has been informed by feedback from the current panel of trainers in Meitheal and staff with Meitheal who have wide-ranging experience of providing training in the use of these skills and in facilitation themselves: Helen White; Maeve Healy; Ann Hegarty; Julie Uí Chróinín, and Annette Hannon.

My own group work and facilitation skills have continued to develop in the intervening years and are always enhanced by each and every group I work with. I hope this book contributes to the ongoing development of facilitation as a tool for participation, inclusion and positive social change to support the development of a more equal and just society.

Finally, my thanks to all in Meitheal who, during the past ten years, have made the contents of the book a reality in community development and social change settings.

**Patricia Prendiville**  
**Meitheal**  
**May, 2004**

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While every effort has been made to ensure that the information contained in this handbook is accurate, no legal responsibility is accepted by the author or the Combat Poverty Agency for any errors or omissions.

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# Preface



Combat Poverty is a statutory advisory agency that develops and promotes measures to combat poverty in Ireland.

*Developing Facilitation Skills* was first published in 1995 as part of Combat Poverty's role to provide good quality information and practical assistance to people working in the community and voluntary sector on poverty issues. In 2003 a new and updated edition was commissioned to take account of the following factors:

- new opportunities for people and communities experiencing poverty to be involved in activities promoting change
- ongoing demand for the existing title
- evolving good practice around facilitation and group work skills
- social change since 1995.

Combat Poverty's objective for this new version of *Developing Facilitation Skills* is to support and strengthen the capacity of people working in community-based or anti-poverty contexts to be involved in articulating, creating and contributing to social change in favour of people living in poverty. Facilitation skills are an important tool of empowerment towards this objective and towards giving expression to the voice of the excluded.

Combat Poverty will promote this revised edition to:

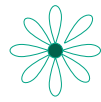
- community workers or activists, tackling poverty and disadvantage in local, area-based, regional or national contexts
- volunteers in community or voluntary groups tackling poverty

- management committee members of community and/or voluntary groups
- local government or HSE workers supporting social inclusion initiatives
- trainers.

Combat Poverty is very appreciative and delighted to acknowledge the expertise and dedication of the author, Patricia Prendiville. Her rich experience of facilitation in various contexts is evident in the style and content of *Developing Facilitation Skills*.

December 2004

## Chapter One



# Using this Book

This book is about facilitation, working in groups and suggesting ways in which the reader can develop skills in facilitation. It is aimed at people who are working with groups in some context, who already have some experience of facilitating and who, most of all, are interested in developing skills in this area.

It briefly explains the theory of facilitation and its links with group development and ensures the relevance of the practical exercises, with sections aimed at the practitioner called *'Spotlight on the Facilitator'*.

The various chapters look at aspects of facilitation, using the theory of groups to show the reader where the many aspects of facilitation may be used depending on the development of a group.

Irish society has changed a great deal in the past ten years – there is a broader diversity of cultures, ethnicity, religions and beliefs. There is also a much higher awareness of equality and the lack of it, the inclusion and exclusion of certain groups of people, the need for greater participation of people in creating a society that addresses inequalities and especially poverty and disadvantage.

Facilitation as a method has been incorporated by many organisations and groups as a tool which will enhance the integration, inclusion, involvement, participation and equality of all members of a community.

While facilitation on its own cannot achieve the level of social change that has been identified as crucial to create a better society

for more people, it is a necessary method that stimulates equality while also practising equality.

The experience of using facilitation methods within communities to address issues of poverty, social exclusion and disadvantage has created a strong desire for people to develop the skills for themselves. This book will help trainee facilitators/readers to learn.

## Developing a Skills Enhancement Programme

The purpose of this book is to enable people to develop their facilitation skills. A key element in this is to direct attention to those areas, skills, techniques and knowledge that are specific and unique to each person. Therefore it is highly recommended that a Skills Enhancement Programme is developed. Throughout the book there are sections which focus on your own skills, values, beliefs and experiences. These require you to undertake some self-reflection and self-analysis, neither of which is necessarily easy. It is essential that the two elements are kept as constructive and practical as possible. People learn in different ways and some techniques and methods will be very useful to one person but not at all to another. When setting up your learning programme, remember to pay attention to the methods that work best for you. Not all intelligences respond to the same stimulation, and it is useful to remember this for working with groups as well.

A useful method for developing a Skills Enhancement Programme includes the following steps:

- Identify a person to support your development, e.g. an experienced colleague, a supervisor, an external trainer.
- Agree a timeframe of work with this person – number, frequency and duration of meetings.
- Obtain a notebook for documenting your action plans and noting your progress.
- Set up a series of opportunities where you can practise your facilitation skills.
- Regularly review your progress with your support person.
- Build in feedback exercises with every group you work with and use this data to direct your next phase of learning.
- Review your progress at the end of the agreed Programme time and create your next steps for ongoing development.
- Stay practising and learning even after the Skills Enhancement Programme has formally ended.

The facilitator will frequently be asked to analyse her/his function as a facilitator. This enables the development of a strong positive sense of self in relation to facilitation work. Those elements of the facilitator's work which need improvement will become evident as the reader/facilitator progresses through the book and completes the sections '*Spotlight on the Facilitator*' which provide an opportunity for reflection and analysis.

A key element of the Skills Enhancement Programme is to recognise the importance of knowing and understanding your motivation for using facilitation. Why do you think this is a useful tool? Secondly, it is important to know what values and principles you bring to group work. Working in groups is not neutral and no facilitator comes without a set of beliefs, attitudes, opinions and perspectives. What is crucial is to know yourself, to acknowledge your beliefs and to work towards enabling the group achieve its purpose.

Many people consider that the role of facilitator is to strive for neutrality. Actually, the role of a facilitator is to work with all shades of opinion within a group, to encourage discussion, honest expression, respect for other opinions and to create an atmosphere whereby all perspectives can be included. This does not mean that a facilitator doesn't have any opinions, that the facilitator agrees with every perspective or that the group has to accept all opinions. Facilitators and groups must work towards expression and understanding and as much inclusion or at least expression of diverse opinions/ perspectives as possible.

Groups, obviously, are entitled to come to a set of beliefs that characterise and define that group. It is important for a facilitator to acknowledge if there is a conflict between their own values and principles and those of the group as a whole. Both the group and the facilitator may need to work on agreeing whether they can continue to work together or not.



The group work process described in the book will vary in practice from group to group, but the overall picture of group work presented will be visible in groups which the reader/ facilitator deals with. Some aspects of a group's development only emerge over long periods of time, others occur in every meeting. Don't assume that every group will have every single feature described here!

The book is designed to be used over a period of time by the reader who is a trainee facilitator and keen to improve her/ his facilitation skills. It allows the trainee facilitator to create a Skills Enhancement Programme with realistic goals in relation to particular skills or areas of group work. The practical exercises and '*Spotlight on the Facilitator*' questions will help to create a relevant and achievable development programme.

An experienced facilitator will choose an approach to working with a group which will suit the needs of the group members, the stage of the group's development and the roles that have emerged. This book offers information and guidance on how to improve facilitation techniques so that facilitators can adapt their skills effectively to most group situations.

To support the continuing development and professionalism of a facilitator, it is highly recommended that regular and frequent supervision is obtained for the work. As mentioned above, the supervisor could be a colleague or someone who is skilled in facilitation or supervision, who will encourage and help the reader/trainee facilitator keep to

her/his plan and to enhance the awareness and reflection of the facilitator practitioner.

Finally, it is important to note that while facilitation and group work are multi-skilled activities with many responsibilities attached to them, they should be experienced as enjoyable ways to use skills and get a task completed.

Developing facilitation skills comes with practice, self-analysis and an openness to challenging ways of operating. The questions and exercises in the following chapters will act as a guide on this journey.



## Chapter Two

# Working with Groups

### Topics discussed in this chapter:

- What is facilitation?
- Styles of facilitation
- Principles and values
- Limitations
- The individual
- The group
- Understanding the group
- Communicating with the group
- Co-facilitation: working with a partner
- Spotlight on the facilitator

### What is facilitation?

Facilitation is a way of working with people. Facilitation enables and empowers people to carry out a task or perform an action. The facilitator does not perform the task, but uses certain skills in a process which allows the individuals/group reach their decision/set their goal/learn a skill. Facilitation is a developmental educational method which encourages people to share ideas, resources, opinions and to think critically in order to identify needs and find effective ways of satisfying those needs.

Facilitation is a method that can be used in many settings. Although it is usually used with groups of people, individuals can be facilitated too. The following are examples of where facilitation occurs:

- Therapists may use facilitation with clients.
- Teachers may use facilitation skills to encourage learners to think and develop opinions and ideas.
- Career planners may use facilitation skills to enable clients to chart a career path.

- A community activist may use facilitation skills to discover the needs of lone parents in her/his area.

Facilitation encourages greater participation and responsibility for decisions. Through facilitation, group members come to value and develop their own expertise and skills. Facilitation involves many facets of interaction between individuals, such as clarification, conflict management and planning. It can be learned and developed through practice and supervision. An openness to constant learning and development is necessary for anyone seeking to improve his/her facilitation skills.

A facilitator helps people to decide what they want to accomplish, reminds them of their responsibility in achieving it, and encourages and helps them to complete an agreed task or activity. The facilitator ensures that the needs of individuals within the group are recognised, acknowledged and responded to; this is seen as an integral part of the task at hand and not superfluous to it.

In some settings the facilitator plays an objective role, asking questions, encouraging responses and enabling group members to discuss, to respond and to reach a conclusion. In other situations, s/he may be stimulating group members to create solutions to problems they have identified by offering suggestions or creating simulations which the group can practise.

In facilitation there is an equal emphasis on achieving the task and on the process involved in that achievement. Group members work together towards a defined end/goal

and, at the same time, focus on how they are working together to ensure the development and support of each other within the group and throughout the process.

Inherent in facilitation are the principles of equality, inclusion, participation and affirmation. In group terms this means recognising the value of each person's contribution, encouraging the active participation of each group member in identifying and utilising her/his skills, experience, creativity and analysis. This understanding and sharing of skills enables individuals and groups to plan for development and change.

Facilitation is influenced by principles which support the view that people should be actively involved in determining their own lives, and that in this way a more equal society can be created. Facilitation has been accepted as a good practice to be adopted and used in the area of personal, group, organisational and social development as well as in the voluntary and community sector.

## Styles of facilitation

Facilitators use a wide range of styles with groups, depending on the task/activity and people involved, time available and needs of group members. The various styles enable particular matters to be addressed most effectively, and facilitators should be able to modify their style to meet the group's needs.

For the task, a facilitator's approach/role may be one or a combination of the following:

- **Directive:** giving people information, instructing them how to do something, such as: 'This is how to develop a work plan.'
- **Exploratory:** asking questions, encouraging people to voice their experience and ideas, such as: 'What did you find useful in the last community group you were part of?'
- **Delegating:** assigning tasks, roles, functions to individuals. For example, in planning a facilitation training session with a group, some organisational tasks may need to be shared.
- **Participative:** taking part in discussion, sharing personal experiences and encouraging others to do likewise, such as: 'The first time I ever did a skills- sharing workshop like this was . . .'

For the process, a facilitator's approach/role may be one or a combination of the following:

- **Interpretive:** putting other words on a contribution or helping someone to find the words to express what s/he means.
- **Cathartic:** encouraging and modelling the expressions of feelings and emotions as they emerge by asking a question such as: 'And was that a very painful time?'
- **Evaluative:** assessing what someone says, providing a statement of value in relation to behaviour, such as: 'That seems to have worked well for you.'
- **Sharing:** encouraging the sharing of past and present feelings and those about

future events, with a question such as: 'Does anyone else feel this way?'

- **Directive:** guiding members as they explore their feelings and begin to express them, such as: 'Let's take a few moments to gather our thoughts and think about how this event has affected the group.'

## Principles and values of facilitation

Facilitators should demonstrate, verbally and non-verbally, their commitment to the following principles:

- **Listening:** facilitation means listening to what people are saying and tuning in to what they are not saying. This includes being aware of verbal and non-verbal means of communication.
- **Confidentiality:** to participate fully, people must be confident that everything of relevance can be discussed freely without inappropriate reporting outside the group. Group members will normally decide what level of detail can be reported to those not in the group.
- **Respect:** a facilitator must acknowledge and respect each individual and prevent other group members from undermining the basic respect that should be accorded to each individual in the group.
- **Equality:** each person is regarded as having an equal right to contribute, to influence, to determine the direction of the group as another. Equality also relates to respect, valuing of personal experience and participation.
- **The value of personal experience:** each member's contribution to a discussion/skill-sharing activity is equally valid and valuable.
- **Agreed goals:** members must share an agreed goal if they are to develop a belief in and sense of ownership of the group.
- **Group process:** facilitation requires giving attention to how the group operates. This includes attempting to resolve conflict or any other difficulty that might arise in the group.
- **Trust and safety:** to ensure maximum participation, the facilitator must encourage the development of trust and safety.
- **Inclusion and encouragement:** everyone in the group must be included and encouraged to participate, to share ideas, suggestions, solutions and take initiative.
- **The importance of a positive/beneficial experience:** facilitators must recognise that everyone is entitled to positive experience in the group. This means the facilitator meeting realistic individual needs and/or being aware of and challenging unrealistic expectations of the group or the facilitator.
- **Participation:** facilitation succeeds when there is a genuine belief in the value of responding to stated needs in relation to the work of the group. Consultation with group members on direction, pace, content and method with an openness to change is vital.

## Limitations of facilitation

Facilitation is not a panacea for all group work. It has its limitations. Facilitated groups are not therapy groups, although therapy groups may be led by qualified counsellors/therapists skilled in facilitation. Personal development groups may be led by facilitators who are also trained in the use of other

more specific skills, such as organisational development or community development and vice versa. Agreeing the purpose of each group is important so that appropriate and relevant boundaries can be developed and maintained.

Facilitating groups is not an easy task. Group members may focus on the facilitator as the cause of their discontent or may use her/him to avoid confrontation with other group members. Chapter Four describes the joint process of deciding what will be dealt with during a group session and provides guidelines on how to avoid or curb unrealistic expectations of the facilitator.

Facilitation is a method of working – it is used to agree goals, plans, actions which depend on the values and vision of the people being facilitated for the outcomes to contribute to a better and more equal society. But the method of facilitation is also used by people whose vision of society does not involve change in the current situation. It is important to remember that it is the values, principles and beliefs of the group members and of the facilitator which can channel the outcomes to positive social change and not facilitation by itself.

## The individual and facilitation

Individuals within a group have various needs. These vary widely depending on the group's stage of development. The following is a list of some of the psychological needs of individuals within groups:

- security, safety and clarity
- belonging and acceptance

- recognition and esteem
- task achievement, work and goal attainment
- becoming more fully known and accepted as an individual
- celebration of achievement
- creating new goals and targets
- letting go and moving on

When an individual joins a group s/he wants to belong, yet to remain independent. S/he also may come along with a sense of having a 'territory' – an area of unique expertise or knowledge which is hers/his and which s/he perceives to be particular to her/him and owned by her/him alone. This can be a positive indication of a unique contribution to make to the group or it can be negative when it is jealously guarded and treated as out of bounds to other members of the group. In the early stages of membership, the need to belong to the group is usually stronger than the need for individual expression. Later, the need for independence becomes stronger.

Conflicting needs may arise in relation to realising a goal and the group process. For example, someone may want to continue a discussion on a topic while others may be anxious to get on with completing a practical task. The facilitator must recognise the importance of both goal achievement and process.

A facilitator needs a wide range of skills to intervene effectively and to encourage positive development of the group. Being aware of the needs of individual group members, or being able to judge what those needs might be, makes for better facilitation.

## The group and facilitation

A facilitator must be conscious of her/his own behaviour if s/he wants to promote the group's development. S/he must analyse accurately the patterns of behaviour developing in the group. S/he must recognise the roles assumed by group members and, most importantly, be aware of how s/he interacts with the group in general and with individuals in particular.

People in groups have, according to Adair (Adair, 1986) three inter-linking areas of need. These are the need to:

1. Achieve the task.
2. Develop and be supported as an individual.  
This involves ensuring that group members are comfortable, feel involved, recognised and valued. This is sometimes called 'maintaining' which involves providing support for individuals to ensure their wellbeing and comfort in the group.
3. Develop and 'maintain' the group as a group – an entity with its own characteristics or culture.

In recognising these three sets of needs, it can be seen how individual needs in the group relate to all three areas. A good facilitator recognises which needs are being expressed at any given time and decides whether a particular intervention is appropriate or not.

## Spotlight on the facilitator

Ask yourself these questions and, after reflection, write down your responses:

1. Styles and process of facilitation
  - Which of the process/task styles do you use most often?
  - Is there a style you do not use? Why not?
  - Is there a style you use frequently? Why?
  - Is this helping the group?
  - Could you widen your repertoire of styles? How?
2. How do you rate yourself as a facilitator?  
It is useful, now and again, to check out your definition of facilitation – the areas in which you are using your skills and how effectively you are using those skills. Make a list of the groups and settings where you currently use facilitation skills. The following questions can help you to evaluate your performance:
  - What is the group task?
  - How do you focus on the group's working methods?
  - How do you feel about this group?
  - What is the group's future direction?
  - Are there any difficulties in working with this group?
  - What is going well with this group?
  - How do you feel about the group's progress?
  - What skills are you using to enhance the working and the work of this group?
  - How do you feel about yourself as a facilitator with this group?
  - What might you do differently with this group to better use your skills, or meet the groups stated needs?

### 3. Feelings about facilitation

In answering the following questions you will articulate your beliefs, wishes, fears and feelings about facilitation. This will guide your future development and use of facilitation skills. Take your time answering the questions. Write down your answers and talk them through with a friend, colleague or supervisor.

(a) Why do you use facilitation skills in your work?

- How do you feel when asked to facilitate?
- What are your thoughts/words/reactions in response to a request to facilitate?
- How do you feel before/during/after a facilitation session?

(b) List the fears and anxieties you have about:

- facilitation in general
- facilitating particular groups of people
- facilitating in particular settings
- facilitating particular themes or topics

Your beliefs and values about facilitation will inevitably change over time. The following questions may be challenging and you may find yourself giving different answers at different times in your work.

- Describe what you consider to be a good environment for learning and development.
- How does your work method reflect your beliefs and values about people/group work/development?
- How do you think facilitation contributes to the achievement of a task/activity within a group?

### 4. Motivation and benefits

- What motivates you in your work?
- How do you benefit from facilitation work?
- How do you think the people you work with benefit from your use of facilitation?

### 5. Improving facilitation skills

- What are your strengths as a facilitator?
- What areas do you need to develop as a facilitator?

The list of strengths and areas needing development in your work will be used frequently in exercises in this book, so keep it close at hand.



## Understanding the group

All groups have a dynamic, a way in which the individuals in the group interact and form a pattern of interaction. The study of these patterns, in a group setting, is called group dynamics. A facilitator's work in a group can be explored through an examination of both content and process, that is, through an examination of what s/he is working on (content), such as deciding on funding or agreeing a programme for a women's centre.

An examination of process is done by exploring how s/he is working with the group and what is happening in the group, both for the facilitator and individual members. By exploring the work of groups at these levels, a facilitator acquires a more complete picture of the group and its dynamic. An understanding of this two-tier analysis can assist the facilitator when s/he is planning sessions and involved in exercise design and effective intervention. Recognition of both individual and group needs and the desire to meet them influences what is included in any session.

The facilitator's work is more effective when s/he recognises the needs, roles and resistance of group members. It also allows her/him to distinguish between what is happening because of the facilitator and what is happening because of the group's make-up.

Projection is a defence mechanism which people use from time to time in their interactions with other people. Projection describes the situation where a person recognises a feature in someone else which they deny having themselves. Usually these features are considered to be negative or

undesirable thoughts, feelings or reactions. People project the undesirable feature away from themselves and highlight it in the other person so that s/he will be more comfortable with her/himself.

A better grasp of group dynamics means the facilitator can check on her/himself more easily and not confuse what is happening for her/him with what is happening for group members. The ability to make this distinction gives a facilitator a clearer view of how certain conflicts or difficulties may be resolved. There are books on the subject (see reading list), but one of the best ways of learning group dynamics is to be part of as many groups as possible to explore the process and structures inherent in them.

### Remember:

- The deeper the facilitator's understanding of her/himself, the easier it is for her/him to perceive where her/his feelings/attitudes diverge from those of the group.
- Be clear about where the facilitator's involvement and commitment to a group begins and ends. In this way, the facilitator takes care of her/himself as a group worker.
- When considering the facilitator's needs, it is important not to strive to fulfil unreasonable expectations which the group may have of the facilitator.
- If the facilitator becomes aware of negative projections within the group s/he should make sure to challenge and work with them.



## Spotlight on the facilitator

Ask yourself these questions and after reflection, write down your responses.

1. Think of a group you facilitate and answer the following questions on content and process:

- What is happening to feelings and moods in the group?
- What differences do you see between your earlier approach to facilitation and now?
- Are you more aware of group processes?
- How has this benefited your planning, exercise selection, interventions and the group?

## Communicating with the group

When interacting with the group, the facilitator must remember that a two-way process of transmitting and receiving information is in operation. Both sender and receiver interpret messages in different ways, depending on a number of factors such as class, ethnic background, gender, sexual orientation and age.

A facilitator's interaction with group members is both verbal and non-verbal. The verbal interactions are stated openly using speech. The non-verbal are not stated in speech but are transmitted in other ways such as in body language. Both have a powerful effect on the group, and a facilitator needs to be aware of the impact s/he can have as a result of the position s/he holds within a group.

### **Verbal interaction examples:**

- Comments to people: 'You're very brave to say that.'
- Expressions of values and attitudes: 'I really like strong women.'
- Volume and tone of voice.
- Revealing political agenda by excluding or including certain beliefs: 'The unemployed have only themselves to blame'. 'I believe that while it is hard, we need to work towards including everyone who lives in this community'.

### **Non-verbal interaction examples:**

- Facial expressions and posture.
- Assumptions based on gender.
- Assumption of a person's social class.
- Perception of a person's racial or ethnic background.
- How and when a person chooses to sit, move, or hold themselves.

How the facilitator interacts with group members strongly influences the group process. It is not only what the facilitator says, but how s/he behaves that is important. People take in messages (verbal and non-verbal) from each other all the time. The non-verbal can either enhance or contradict a point being communicated. Saying you are not angry, while clearly giving off the body message of a stiff back and hurt expression are contradictory signals.

### **Verbal messages**

**Tone of voice:** tone is a powerful indicator to group members. Contradictory messages can be conveyed by adopting a tone of voice which opposes the message, such as: 'I'd like everyone to participate' – this said in a deadpan voice may lead to low levels of participation!

**Volume and pitch:** can indicate various messages to people. High pitch often indicates excitement, fear or nervousness. Loud volume could be anger, frustration or fear. Altering the volume of one's voice is helpful to indicate a change of direction, to generate enthusiasm or to gain attention.

**Interpreting:** providing an interpretation of another's behaviour or attitude is a powerful interaction on the part of the facilitator. Facilitators should offer suggestions of interpretation rather than make pronounced statements of interpretation: 'This is the best way to do that.' The facilitator must be alert to the way her/his values and beliefs may influence her/his interpretation.

**Language:** the language a facilitator uses enables others to understand her/his purpose. Language must be clear and jargon free. People can feel very uncomfortable if they don't understand the language, for example the use of abbreviations/acronyms instead of the full name of an organisation – INOU instead of Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed, ADM instead of Area Development Management, or SE for Social Economy programme. Usage of language in this way can be excluding. The facilitator should give a strong message of inclusion in her/his language.

A facilitator must also pay special attention to the primary spoken language of all group members. Given the increased numbers of people involved in local communities who have English as a second language, the issue of pace, accent, clarification and clear pronunciation are ever more important.

### **Non-verbal messages**

It is not only with words and sounds that people communicate. Messages are sent and received through channels other than speech and hearing. The facilitator cannot know how someone will interact with her/him but can be aware of the possible effects of her/his actions. Encouraging feedback from participants about the behaviour of the facilitator and how s/he presents her/himself to the group can help the facilitator develop and deepen self-awareness.

**Gender:** people relate differently to women and men. All members of society have been brought up to have expectations of behaviour appropriate to women and to men and with experiences of women and men operating in different spheres. Meeting women and men who differ from these stereotypes can stimulate feelings that alter a person's behaviour. Some people might be more comfortable in a single sex group with a facilitator of the opposite sex or in a mixed group with a woman as facilitator.

**Social class:** Irish society is divided along lines of social class according to access to resources. The facilitator's class background is relevant for group members and will influence interactions and the perception of her/him within a group. The class

background of the group members will also influence these interactions and perceptions. Social class background affects people's expectations, self-esteem, methods and approaches of working, and their view of the world.

**Race and ethnicity:** everyone is raised in cultural and ethnic groups which offer a specific and valuable awareness and perception of the world. Some races and cultures are more dominant and pervasive than others. This influences how people in both dominant and minority cultures interact; this, in turn, impacts on a group's interactions. Travellers are the largest indigenous ethnic minority in Ireland. Other ethnic minority groups include people from different African countries, Asia, central and eastern Europe and the Philippines.

Linked with race and ethnicity is the question of religion as a cultural definer. Many people living in Ireland identify as Muslim, Hindu as well as Christian. Facilitators need to clarify their own understanding of how these cultural elements can impact on their work. For example, using the term *first name* rather than *Christian name*, or not assuming Sunday as the 'holy day'.

**Age:** assumptions are made about people on the basis of their age. These assumptions affect group interactions. These might be in terms of suitability, ability, relevance or appropriateness of exercises, approach, inclusion or equality of opportunity.

**Disability:** disabilities of all types, whether physical or mental (including learning

disabilities), will influence the interactions of people within a group. Some disabilities are less evident than others. Facilitators need to ensure assumptions are not being made about people's ability based on value judgements about disabilities.

**Sexual orientation:** as with race and ethnicity, sexuality and sexual orientation may be conveyed non-verbally in groups. A facilitator should be comfortable with the differences in any group in order to enable the group to be comfortable with difference.

**Movement:** distracting or abrupt movements by the facilitator can distract the group and upset concentration. Sudden movement may shock and distract attention. Fidgeting with jewellery, papers, chair, or going out of the room abruptly may be disturbing behaviour and should be kept to a minimum.

**Body language:** holding oneself with tightly folded arms can indicate anxiety or fear to the group. In turn this may inhibit participation and prevent a working atmosphere from developing. A relaxed but attentive facilitator sends out signals of being in control and so provides the group with a sense of security. How and where a facilitator stands and whether s/he stands while others sit (or vice versa) will convey a message about equality between the facilitator and participants. To promote equality, sit with others as much as possible.

**Clothes:** style of dressing conveys a message. People have individual preferences; the facilitator needs to dress according to her/his own and the group members' comfort. If a facilitator is dressed very differently from the group, this may distance her/him.

**Boundaries:** in facilitation, a boundary is 'an invisible line' drawn around oneself when working with groups. This line demarcates the extent of the facilitator's involvement. It can also indicate to the group what it can expect in terms of personal disclosure, social involvement and work limits on the part of the facilitator. For example, if a facilitator is clear that the agreement is for a session to end at five o'clock, then her/his boundary line will insist that s/he finishes at that time, even if the group wants to go on for another hour and is pressurising her/him to do so.

Group members also have boundaries between themselves, each other and the facilitator. It is important that people continue to have a sense of themselves as individuals and are not overwhelmed by the group or by over-identification with certain group members.

People sometimes concentrate so much on the group and the task/activity that they neglect each other or group feelings. The facilitator must remind the group that while the task/activity is important, so too is the group process and the wellbeing of all participants.

### **Remember:**

- It can be difficult to eliminate the sets of ideas, assumptions, beliefs of, and perhaps prejudices against, other people.
- It is the facilitator's job to recognise how these assumptions operate, negatively and positively, within the group.
- It is also the facilitator's role to work at challenging and diluting the negative impacts of any prejudice within a group.
- The facilitator's ability and readiness to challenge negative effects of social prejudice is an important indicator to group members that this behaviour is not to be tolerated.
- The facilitator can encourage the group members to create a group contract which excludes prejudices, stereotyping or discrimination by agreeing that these are all to be challenged. This creates a safe space outside of which members agree to leave their negative beliefs and values.

### **Co-facilitation: working with a partner**

The technique of working with a partner can be rewarding for a group and its facilitators, but it is a practice which requires planning and periodic evaluation with the co-worker, if it is to yield results. Co-facilitation has advantages and disadvantages.

Not everyone wants to or is ready to co-facilitate. If a facilitator chooses to co-facilitate, it is crucial to plan how the two will share the work, how they can best support each other and that they learn to communicate effectively. It must never be forgotten that the focus of co-facilitation remains the group and its needs.

Co-facilitation may be used as a training mechanism for one of the co-facilitating pair. While this works well, care must be taken that the group does not lose out by time/energy being directed towards the co-facilitators.

Advantages of co-facilitation:

- Eases the pressure of full responsibility.
- Allows for joint planning, evaluation and feedback.
- Brings different experiences and attributes to the group.
- Means a greater sharing of skills, resources and energy.
- Enables less experienced facilitators to develop skills.

Disadvantages of co-facilitation:

- Joint planning, evaluation and feedback is time-consuming.
- Co-facilitators can be 'played off against each other'.
- One co-facilitator may get on better with the group.
- Feelings of insecurity may arise for facilitators
- One co-facilitator may dominate.
- Rivalry between co-facilitators may develop.
- Vague definitions and unclear delineation of responsibilities may cause problems between co-facilitators.

## Remember:

- Chose to work with someone whose values are similar to your own.
- Plan work together.
- Decide how sections of the session will be shared.
- Discuss how the session will be divided between two.
- Decide who will take which section.
- Consider how to behave when the other person is facilitating.
- Decide whether to leave the room, participate or remain silent.
- Plan to let the group know the session/ programme will be jointly facilitated.
- Decide what to do when one person wants to interrupt the other.
- Allow some flexibility so that non-threatening, non-challenging contributions may be welcomed by the other partner (for instance, if one facilitator has forgotten something, or if one facilitator has a different experience that could be usefully shared).
- Support each other during the session – offer appropriate feedback and provide a second voice to the facilitator if you detect resistance or dissent from the group.
- Agree never to side with the group against your co-facilitator.
- After the session, evaluate both performances jointly.
- Give positive and critical feedback on how the two facilitators might improve their work together.
- Plan the next session on the basis of the previous one.

## Spotlight on the facilitator

Explore these questions for yourself, and with the person with whom you may be co-facilitating. You don't need to answer all of the questions on each occasion – use them as probes for exploration.

- Do I like working by myself, and why do I want to co-facilitate?
- Am I confident about my partner's facilitation and group work skills?
- Have we a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities?
- What will my partner add to the group process?
- What will it be like for me working in front of a colleague?
- Do we co-operate efficiently at the discussing and planning stages?
- What works well between us?
- What doesn't work well between us?
- How can we solve these difficulties?
- Do I feel safe about giving feedback on my performance and that of my colleague? If not, why not?
- How can we develop our joint technique?
- How will I, and the group, benefit from co-facilitating?
- How will I respond if the group seems to prefer my colleague?

## Remember:

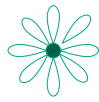
### Do

- Know how you can develop your own skills
- Have support and supervision for your work
- Gather and create relevant resource materials
- Cover topics you are competent and confident with
- Know the types and sizes of groups with which you will work
- Understand your requirements and limitations
- Know the times you will work
- Know the fee, if any, you will charge
- Take part in group processes to enhance your awareness of the feelings and reactions that being a participant brings
- Give attention to speakers
- Be aware of body language
- Listen to your own body
- Accept responsibility for your reactions and responses
- Accept your errors and mistakes

### Don't

- Over-analyse
- Allow one person to dominate
- Take up too much time yourself
- Develop favourites or favour one opinion within the group
- Allow verbal or physical violence within the group
- Talk about a person in the group
- Pretend to be neutral
- Intimidate by use of language/jargon or by constantly standing
- Bluff – if you don't know what to do, say so and ask for advice from the group

## Chapter Three



# How Groups Develop

### Topics discussed in this chapter:

- Stages of group development
- Life cycles
- Models of group development
- Roles in groups
- Norms in groups
- Naming norms
- Working with norms and how facilitators' values, beliefs and assumptions impact on groups
- Spotlight on the facilitator

An understanding of how groups start up, develop and sometimes end, can help a facilitator considerably. This chapter concentrates on group development. The ways to identify the various stages in a group's life are considered. Every group has a life cycle during which various factors influence its overall action, behaviour, attitudes and character.

A knowledge of theories/models of group development is useful for a facilitator. This knowledge can stimulate a facilitator's own professional growth, or enable her/him to initiate discussion with a group on the stages of its development and the characteristic roles therein. This should further the facilitator's understanding of what is happening at group level. Having a bigger picture of what is going on in and for the group will ensure a more effective and efficient use of time – both the facilitator's and that of group members.

### Stages of group development

Most groups have a life cycle that has a specific timeframe, thus making the naming

of the beginning, the middle and the end quite simple. Other groups can exist with changing personnel involved for years and decades, and there is no evident middle or end. But in cases such as this, it is clear that the group goes through phases, for example, where activity is low, good or high, where enough people are involved.

The following models of group development describe the groups that have a particular timeframe that is easily defined. Nevertheless, many of the phases experienced in open-ended groups can correspond to the phases of groups that end. What is important for a facilitator is to know what form of group s/he is working with and what phase the group is in.

When people meet as a group, the group goes through stages. These stages may occur even over one meeting. If the group continues to meet regularly it will go through stages which have particular characteristics. This is sometimes called the life cycle development of a group. In many ways, what happens in one short meeting is a miniature reflection of what happens over time in an established group.

### Life cycles

The life cycle of a group has a beginning, middle and an end. The beginning stage is where group members work out what they will and can do together, and they establish boundaries or limits for themselves and the group.

The middle phase is characterised by building on first impressions. Understandings are developed and difficulties that arise



are worked through because the group recognises its work as valuable.

Finally, there is the end. This is characterised by saying goodbye, realising they've done what they could together, deciding to move on, celebrating achievements, acknowledging what is still to be done in the area/on the topic, and valuing the relationships formed during the group's life.

## Models of group development

The ideas which inform the following models of group development should enhance the facilitator's understanding of the group's process. Remember, as with individuals, all groups are unique. No group will correspond directly to any model laid out in the pages of a book. All groups will move through the phases outlined below, but not necessarily in the same order. Groups can and do move backwards as well as forwards. And within any one phase, a group might have an internal cycle during which it goes through yet other phases or stages.

As a facilitator's skill develops and s/he becomes more proficient and experienced, s/he will notice that some categorisations will be more useful for particular groups. Experienced facilitators inter-mingle many suggested systems/models and so achieve a broad analysis of what is happening in many group settings.

Being aware of the phase/stage of a group is important so that the facilitator can match her/his sessions to that phase and be prepared to make appropriate interventions. Below are two models of group development.

These may be useful when attempting to characterise and pinpoint the particular stage a group is at, in an effort to better understand its possible needs. There are many variations on these models of group development.

### **Model A: The Action-Based Model**

Five stages/phases depicting the needs of the group and associated behaviour of members. (Adair & Benson)

#### **1. Forming stage**

*Members' needs:* to be comfortable within the group, safe, to know and share information.

*Behaviour evident:* people are polite, nervous, shy and tend to assess others at this stage. Members try to understand the group 'rules', to determine the group task. Roles may be assumed, for example, an ideas person emerges, that is someone who is good at coming up with 'this is what we could do', or a support person may emerge, that is someone who can organise a space, a grant or a facility for the group.

#### **2. Storming stage**

*Members' needs:* to belong and to be secure in the group, to review aims and absorb material.

*Behaviour evident:* possible combination of non co-operation, resistance to agreed aims, challenge to agreed aims, sabotage of group work, or the facilitator may be challenged by those reluctant to move on or re-define. This may seem negative, but in fact it is a very useful way for people to begin to deal with their needs. Experiencing a 'storming' (a period of high energy involvement) enables a group to



move on to the next stage and to feel more ownership of and involvement with the group.

### 3. Norming stage

*Members' needs:* to be independent, recognised and to have self-esteem.

*Behaviour evident:* leadership roles may be taken on, the task agreed. There may be positive challenges to other members and in relation to the task.

### 4. Performing stage

*Members' needs:* individual maintenance for personal needs which re-emerge must be recognised and met within the group. Deeper relationships are established between members and the need to celebrate achievement strengthens.

*Behaviour evident:* members get involved in group facilitating; realistic attitudes to and about people emerge, and roles that people assume in relation to the work of the group and the development of new norms are accepted.

### 5. Ending stage

*Members' needs:* anxiety and a sense of loss will emerge among members as the group's life nears conclusion and the decision to break up is taken. A strong need is felt to mark this ending, acknowledge what has been achieved and look forward to new beginnings and tasks.

*Behaviour evident:* possible combination of blaming, refusal to let go, and anger with other group members. These are a reflection of the sense of loss due to the ending of the group.

Within this cycle, groups may revisit stages depending on how long the group is established, on individual needs and on the nature of the group task. It is possible that a group will form, storm, norm and perform several times over if they are together long enough.

### **Model B: Developmental model leading to state of cohesiveness**

#### **Getting started**

This preparatory stage is concerned with practical issues, such as numbers, location, structure of meetings/sessions, responsibility, agreeing a common aim and basic rules, finding out why members chose this group, naming hopes and expectations, and establishing commitment to this new group.

#### **Nurturing**

This is the stage where security and trust are established. It involves setting up a safe place for the group, both emotionally and physically, creating conditions of acceptance, understanding, mutual support, confidentiality and nurturing. It relates to the emotional side of being in a group.

#### **Individuating**

This stage involves moving on from the nurturing stage so that individuals can stand independently within the group. People find a sense of themselves again. Members can and do confront each other and give and receive honest feedback. People learn to analyse, to differentiate and separate at this stage. It relates to the critical, intellectual side of being in a group.

### **Cohesiveness**

At this stage, people acknowledge both their individuality and their commitment/belonging to the group. This phase acknowledges the inter-relatedness of each of the members to one another. Each individual is equal, can lead and be led, is active in decision-making, problem-solving and the work of the group generally. There is a balance of task and process, with people expressing their interdependency and satisfaction with being in the group. People will be able to move to the end of the group well, or to continue by renewing the group.

It is important that groups move through the various stages to cohesiveness. While some people will be more comfortable at certain stages of group development, a facilitator will work to bring the group forward.

Cohesiveness reflects a maturity which group members demonstrate in subsequent behaviour and group work.

Some groups may 'get stuck' in a stage or phase, while others may move more swiftly through each phase entering the stage of inter-relatedness for long periods where the needs are met and the group is working well. An alteration/variation in certain factors, such as new members joining or new goals coming on line, may cast the group back to the beginning of the cycle once again.

## **Spotlight on the facilitator**

Ask yourself these questions and, after reflection, write down your responses.

1. Analyse any two groups with which you work by asking if they exhibit the characteristics of the systems described above.
2. Using your knowledge of the stages and life cycles, can you examine how you might move either group closer to its goals?
2. Can you try to pinpoint the period of changeover from one stage to another in the two groups you have chosen from No.1?
3. Can you list the observed behaviour in the group on which you are basing your judgement?
5. How useful is this information for your work?

### **Roles in groups**

If groups can be divided into phases and stages, as demonstrated above, then in each phase members may adopt roles suitable to that stage and to themselves. Roles are sets of behaviour patterns that people have when interacting with other people. They can shift and change (transitory roles) or be set (permanent roles). In terms of group development and group dynamics these roles are informal, that is people adopt them – as opposed to the overt process of role distribution which goes on formally at many groups where chairperson, secretary or treasurer is appointed.

**Transitory roles**

Transitory roles involve individuals taking on behaviour and/or attitudes for short periods within a group as it works towards its aims. These transitory roles vary across and between people and also over time. For instance, a group member may assume a leadership role at certain stages in the group's life, but this role does not belong exclusively to her/him. It may be shared at various points by others. People can also take on multiple roles in any given group – many roles are not mutually exclusive.

Transitory roles can promote or disrupt group work. What is important for the facilitator, is to be able to identify them. These roles emerge as the group develops. They can be divided into roles which are positive for the group process and task/activity, or roles which are disruptive. Positive roles promote the work of the group and move it towards its goal. Disruptive roles adopted by members may lead to damage being done to the group or to the group being hijacked from its agreed task and falling into dysfunction.

**Promoting roles include the following:**

Listening  
Questioning  
Stimulating  
Mediating  
Peacekeeping  
Challenging  
Timekeeping  
Risk-taking  
Evaluating  
Encouraging  
Harmonising  
Clarifying

Commentating  
Co-ordinating  
Initiating  
Summarising  
Supporting

**Disruptive roles include the following:**

Blocking  
Avoiding  
Sabotaging  
Criticising  
Dominating  
Not participating  
Doubting  
Being cynical  
Undermining  
Story-telling  
Breaking confidentiality

These and other roles may emerge and will have to be faced by group members and facilitator. See *Chapter Seven* for advice on how to handle disruptive behaviour.

People sometimes get stuck in behaviour patterns, that is they may be seen as a joker in a group and when they try to make a serious point they are not taken seriously. Group members may find that roles assigned to them by others are more permanent than they thought. Generally, this disrupts group-work and must be challenged. The facilitator should be aware of roles in groups and to determine her/his intervention, should examine issues such as the length of time the group will be together, the best time to challenge the behaviour, and whether the behaviour pattern is inhibiting the group or not. S/he must also be conscious of the task s/he was taken on to complete.

## Permanent roles

These roles involve behaviour and/or attitudes adopted by individuals in all groups. They can also be assigned to a person by other group members. For example, the group could assign the behaviour of listening well to one person or of entertaining to another. Work must be shared if the group is to function successfully. It is important, therefore, that the giving or taking of a role is identified and challenged as early as possible. Encourage group members to widen their repertoire of behaviour – role play (see Chapter Twelve) is an interesting way of allowing group members to ‘taste’ different roles.

Particular roles frequently offer a reward or payoff, such as the status which comes from always being the one to challenge the leader. It is useful to discuss this. If a group is assigning a role to one person, explore how the group feels it benefits from this: what is its payoff or advantage for the group? The answers to these questions should clarify possible areas of action to be taken by the facilitator in addressing/ intervening in the group dynamic.

Permanent roles often result from unchallenged transitory roles or they may result from a person’s life experiences and have developed into personality traits. While the facilitator cannot undo a person’s previous life experiences, at times it can be worthwhile to challenge the patterns to ensure a smoother and more conscious group process. As with transitory roles, permanent roles may be positive and contribute to the group process and task or may be negative and cause disruption and dissatisfaction within the group.

Some permanent roles include the following:

**Scapegoat:** members target one person or vent their frustrations on one person, or insist on one person representing the views of a group instead of allowing her/him to have an individual view. For example, the only woman in an otherwise male group is expected to represent all women.

**Leader:** someone accepts the positives/ negatives of being group leader.

**Nurturing figure:** one person assumes or is assigned the task of nurturing/supporting/ encouraging others. These activities should be displayed evenly throughout the group membership.

**Independence promoting figure:** one person assumes or is given the role of promoting the group, developing its outside links, encouraging group independence, and being task-oriented. These should also be displayed evenly throughout the group.

**Child figure:** one person is denied responsibility, acts as a child in the group or continues with childish behaviour. They bring fun and play to a group. No expectations of adult behaviour are made of this person.

**Patient/client figure:** responsibility and equal participation are not expected of a member because they ‘need help’ or ‘cannot be expected to take things on’.

Members should be encouraged to explore how role assignments occur. This awareness enhances full participation and equality between group members. Both permanent and transitory roles label the behaviour, not the person, so one person may exhibit a combination of roles in one group over time.

This is an important distinction and one which the facilitator must maintain. Taking on roles is natural and normal; they are part of the development and movement of the group. The facilitator's work is to be aware of the roles being taken on. S/he must also raise the group's awareness of these roles and help to evaluate the positive and negative control which the roles have on the group process and the attainment of group goals.

### Remember:

- Some roles encourage and promote development. Others disrupt it. Listening promotes development while cynicism disrupts it.
- All roles are useful for the group. The risk-taker puts down challenges for the group. Even the negative roles can be turned around at times. For example, the critic may raise some valid points.
- Disruptive roles challenge the facilitator. Non-participation by members can sabotage the group process and make a facilitator's life difficult. They also challenge the facilitator and the group to find ways to work together and overcome these challenges.
- When a facilitator can identify behaviour patterns, s/he can devise ways of handling them, and naming them for the group. By doing this s/he creates an atmosphere in which responsibility for promoting positive group work is shared more equally.

## Spotlight on the facilitator

### Developing skills – role difficulties

Ask yourself these questions and, after reflection, write down your responses:

1. What roles have you observed in a group with which you work?
2. How can you encourage group members to take more responsibility for dealing with disruptive behaviour?
3. How do you acknowledge the encouraging and promoting roles?
4. How can more encouraging behaviour be developed?
5. What roles do you take on when in a group?
6. How do you deal with disruptive behaviour in a group?

## Norms in groups

Norms or standards are commonly accepted behaviour, attitudes, beliefs and values existing within a group. Norms in groups invariably reflect the norms that are current in a society – groups can be seen as microcosms of society, to an extent. But norms also reflect sub-groups and communities within society. As a facilitator striving to ensure inclusion and equality, it is crucial to be aware of the norms that exist within any group. Norms are not always immediately evident, but what is certain is that they exist! They can be about the task

and/or the process of the group work, or they can be about the wider society, and they can be constructive or destructive.

During any group's life cycle, norms/standards emerge, become evident and often change over time. Groups with a short lifespan have less opportunity to identify norms, but despite the difference in lifespan, both short and longer-term groups are affected by norms and standards which emerge implicitly or explicitly in every group.

**Explicit norms:** the facilitator or group members propose/agree a particular way of behaving. The group makes a contract/agreement about acceptable/unacceptable behaviour; the group reaches consensus on beliefs and attitudes for its work and there is an exploration of the values held by group members as they affect the group's work. These norms are developed openly, clearly, and with everyone's agreement.

**Implicit norms:** the group begins to operate in a set pattern (beliefs/attitudes/behaviour) with no open discussion or agreement on the validity of the pattern or its acceptability. Agreement may sometimes be implied, since nobody disagrees. At other times, norms may be imposed by a strong individual, a clique or a sub-group within the main group. Lack of clarity, lack of agreement and low participation (the conditions under which implicitly developed group norms thrive) can cause difficulties, especially when the group tries to decide on standards for itself.

Norms and standards often develop implicitly after a group contract/agreement is made.

The group contract is established when the ground rules of the group are agreed, usually in the very first meeting of a facilitated group. It covers explicit norms of behaving and the general positive hopes and aspirations of members for themselves and the group. A facilitator's task is to make all norms explicit – in other words, to name them (see developing a group contract in Chapter Seven).

Some norms relate to role allocation, some to behaviour acceptable within the group, and some to the group's objective or work. Norms may stifle group work, group development or particular individuals within the group. This means the facilitator must be vigilant and intervene wherever norms hinder progress.

## Naming norms

### 1. Task norms

The quality of the end result of the task, the level of work and the distribution of work tasks, or the ways of approaching the task, may lead to explicit or implicit norms evolving within the group.

### 2. Behaviour norms

How will members relate to each other? Will they be friendly or distanced? What level of physical contact is acceptable? Will fun or play-acting be allowed? How will the group manage what they consider unacceptable behaviour? Norms can also influence language and the types of exercises/energisers suitable for a group. Language and fluency and understanding accents will also be a norm about behaviour that facilitators and group members need to work with.



### 3. Attitudes and values

Attitudes can be normalised within a group. In other words, some political/social attitudes may become acceptable while others do not. Obviously, these will affect the group dynamic – the way the group interacts as it undertakes its task. This may also lead to some attitudes being pushed underground in a group because they are treated as unacceptable. For example, strong public criticism of an opinion expressed in a group may lead to those holding that opinion staying silent. This is especially true of attitudes and values that contradict the generally held view, the position put forward by the media or by a very strong and vocal pressure group. In order to promote equality and inclusion, facilitators must strive to work towards developing attitudes of inclusion, respect and equality. This might involve speaking against attitudes that would exclude, discriminate or be disrespectful to some people in the group or in the community/society as a whole.

### 4. Emotional norms

What emotional content will be acceptable within the group? Will it be sympathetic to personal situations and individual feelings? How much support for each other can be expressed within the group rather than on a one-to-one basis? The answers to these questions will determine the implicit and explicit emotional norms in a group.

### 5. Appearance norms

Clothes, make-up, hairstyle, size, skin colour, jewellery can all influence the development of norms. Deviating from the norm can generate distrust, unease, or non-acceptance of the facilitator or group members. It can also

encourage individuality, freedom of expression and a sense that the group can continue to operate even when people are different.

### Working with norms and how facilitators' values, beliefs and assumptions impact on groups

When groups work well together, generally accepted norms can add to a sense of unity and belonging. People feel safe and understand what is expected of them and others in the context of the group. Their sense of partnership is strengthened – they are individuals with something to contribute to the larger group. Simultaneously they are an important part of that group. Norms and standards, therefore, contribute to the atmosphere and can create a favourable environment for individuals and for the achievement of the agreed goals.

Negative norms block creativity, for instance when people are afraid to suggest something different in the group or venture a differing opinion. In this way, the group fails to benefit from active and equal participation. Vagueness about what is expected of and accepted from members causes frustration, non-involvement, the formation of sub-groups and cliques, alliances or pairs – and these inhibit development.

Norms may emerge because one person (or a clique) does not wait for the group to find its own way but sets the tone. Norms can be destructive if they fail to change and develop during a group's lifespan. They should change over time as group members work, interact and develop. The facilitator must be aware of norms and standards as they emerge.

S/he must draw attention to the destructive elements of emerging implicit and explicit norms while working with and developing what is constructive.

- How much do you influence the development of norms in groups you work with?
- Can a facilitator be neutral? Is this desirable?

## Spotlight on the facilitator

Ask yourself these questions and, after reflection, write down your responses:

1. Consider two groups with which you are working. Describe the norms that have emerged in each in relation to: task, behaviour, attitudes and values, emotions and appearance.
2. Compare the norms observed in each group. Suggest what has caused these differences and similarities.
3. How do you bring norms to the attention of group members?
4. How could you improve this technique?
5. Explore your own attitudes/behaviour/beliefs/appearance and your influence in generating norms within groups. Discuss the answers to the following with your supervisor:
  - How appropriate is it to explore the norms of groups?
  - How much attention should be paid to a facilitator's appearance?
  - Is it acceptable for a facilitator to touch group members? In what circumstances?





## Chapter Four

# Preparing, Planning and Designing a Session

### Topics discussed in this chapter:

- Consultation, negotiating and contracting with groups
- Consultation check-list
- Before a session
- Preparation check-list
- Timing
- Planning a session
- Sample plans
- Spotlight on the facilitator

Preparing, planning and designing sessions and consulting the group at each stage of the process are core considerations for the facilitator. Session plans and programmes indicate how the facilitator intends to move through various activities so that group members achieve their aims in a positive atmosphere.

### Consultation

When a facilitator is asked to facilitate a group, a process of sharing information and formulating ideas begins. This is the initial consultation and involves negotiating and contracting particular, specifically designed pieces of work. Sometimes the person who contacts the facilitator will not be part of the group. For example, s/he could be from the group's parent organisation. S/he may have aims which contrast with those of the people the facilitator will eventually meet in a group. Where possible the facilitator should deal directly with a group member.

Consultation involves negotiating and contracting the following:

- An initial contact to verify availability, cost, suitability and interest of the facilitator
- A meeting with the group or representatives of the group to explore the task
- Preparation of a proposal of the group work so that the group can input
- Where necessary, a second meeting to clarify the proposal, make amendments and agree administrative details

It can also help the facilitator to gather information from a variety of sources, including the following:

- Group members/organisation on aims and objectives of the group
- Group's programmes or activities
- How the proposed session relates to other projects undertaken by the group/organisation
- Any underlying issues or difficulties with which the group may be struggling

### Negotiating and Contracting Check-list:

What should a facilitator ask?

#### 1. About the group

- What needs are group members expressing?
- What is their overall aim and task?
- How many people will participate?
- What does the group want to achieve?
- Do people work together already or is this a new group?

- Are people paid or voluntary workers?
- What is the gender ratio?
- What is the race and ethnic minority ratio?
- What is the language to be used by the group?
- What are the care arrangements for group members?
- Does the group reflect local community? How/Why not?
- What is currently happening in the group?
- What is the relationship between the group and the organisation of which it forms a part?
- Do any participants have any physical or learning disabilities? (This is important when devising games/energising exercises that everyone can join in.)

## 2. About the organisation

- What is the organisation's need in relation to the group task?
- What is the aim of the work according to the group?

The facilitator should watch out for discrepancies between the needs identified by the group and those of the parent organisation. If there are any discrepancies, s/he should point them out to both parties and clarify the priorities for her/his work with the group. The facilitator should also attempt to discover whether difficulties exist as a result of conflicting aims.

Sometimes a facilitator's questions may reshape the original aims/needs. If this is so, then the final decision on the group's objective should encompass the needs and wishes of participants and the group/

organisation, if they differ. Clarifying whether the facilitator's contract is with the group or the organisation may help.

## 3. About the location

The venue for the sessions should be checked by the facilitator to ensure that it is suitable.

- Can chairs be moved about if necessary?
- Is there enough air and light?
- Is it adequately heated?
- Is it accessible to all participants, both in terms of physical disability and in terms of getting to the venue?

## 4. About equipment

- What resources does the organisation have at its disposal? (flipchart, paper, pens/markers, photocopying, overhead projector)
- Check that the necessary resources are available and if not, arrange for them to be provided.

## 5. About duration

- How long will it take the group to achieve its aim?
- Is this to be a once-off session or the first of a series?

The facilitator's experience is important here in ascertaining the length of time it may take to achieve the overall aim and what can be realistically covered in any session. The time available to the group will have to be taken into consideration and explored here.

## 6. About fees

The facilitator should ensure agreement about payment of fees before undertaking any project.

## 7. About process

At a second meeting, the facilitator and the group members will discuss the facilitator's proposed plan. At this meeting, methods will be outlined and the facilitator will show how s/he envisages the session progressing and fulfilling members' needs.

### Before a session

Preparation is vital, whether for a once-off session or for a series of sessions. Some aspects of preparation may be completed during the negotiating and contracting phases but others must be addressed before detailing the contents of any session. These include the preparation of the room and one's own preparation.

#### Room preparation check-list

- Is the room bright and spacious with sufficient fresh air?
- Is the room warm but not hot?
- Is the room large enough for the group to move around?
- Is there easy access to toilet facilities?
- Are there sufficient and suitable chairs? (High-backed chairs are preferable while floor cushions can also be used for some types of group work.)
- Is the room needed by any other group?
- Will there be interruptions?
- Is the room as soundproof as possible?
- Does the room meet the needs of any group member(s) with a physical disability?
- Will the room be set up each time the group meets? (Arrange to have it set up by someone – this is the facilitator's responsibility and it may include moving tables and desks to one side, placing chairs/

cushions in a circle so that everyone can see and be seen. Sometimes a horseshoe shape may be more appropriate so that people can see the flipchart/slide projector.)

- Is there any equipment needed which must be set up in advance so that no time is wasted during a session?
- Will flipchart notes or overhead stencils be prepared in advance?
- Are writing or other materials available for the group members before starting any activity?

### Preparation check-list

The facilitator must know what s/he is doing and must have the session designed and planned so that s/he knows what is to happen next. The facilitator should:

- Arrive early, allow time to prepare the room/equipment, and to relax
- Concentrate on the group and the task at hand

Some facilitators use deep breathing, others do stretching exercises, or have a cup of tea. Whatever method a facilitator chooses it is important that s/he focuses on the aim of the session.

### Timing

Getting the timing of a session right is one of the issues which concerns people who are beginning to develop facilitation skills. Too much time can be frustrating when carrying out an activity. Too little time can be equally so. When a facilitator decides how much time to allocate to any exercise it is wise to propose this to the group. If more or perhaps less time

is requested, a revised time may be agreed. Participants must know the consequences of taking more time to complete an exercise: other aspects of the session may have to be cancelled, deferred or at least, curtailed. If this happens in a session, the facilitator should remember to evaluate the session plan in terms of estimated times – perhaps s/he didn't allow sufficient time to begin with or s/he was over-optimistic about what could be achieved in the time allocated.

For the purpose of planning a session, there are two considerations: firstly, when to do what and secondly, how long to give to each part of each session.

### **(i) When to do what**

Deciding the sequence of events in a session is an important aspect of the preparation for any session. Active participation is what every facilitator wants, therefore enough time must be allocated for this to happen. Exercises should be scheduled so that there is no rush and as many people as possible should be involved in each part of each session.

### **Remember:**

When planning the time sequence, keep the following in mind:

- The agreed task of the group
- The number of people in the group
- The period of time the group has been together
- The nature of the exercises and the type of activity in the session
- How people are working together
- Any points of resistance or conflict evident

or reported to the facilitator prior to the session

### **(ii) How long to give each part of a session**

Deciding how long to give each exercise may be daunting when the facilitator is starting out, but as s/he gains experience in group work her/his instincts will be sharpened and her/his confidence will grow.

Common fears about time and group work include:

- Giving too much time to one person and running out of time for others
- Running out of material because members took less time than anticipated
- Failing to cover everything because members took longer to do the exercises than anticipated

### **Remember:**

- Do listening/trust-building exercises (see Chapter Twelve for samples) at the start.
- If a session is long (more than two hours), take a break or do an energiser, play fun exercises, do self-massage, or movement.
- Employ a variety of working methods so that people change partners, groups or techniques regularly.
- Don't leave major items for discussion until too late in the session. People have more energy at the outset.
- Don't pack too much material into a session. Negotiate the workload: how much is it possible to cover? How many sessions might this take?
- If people are talking in pairs, allow 5-10 minutes per person, depending on the subject.

- If people are working in small groups (3-4), allow 5 minutes per person. If small groups consist of five persons or more, give 3-4 minutes per person. This will vary according to the topic and activity.
- Opening a programme/session, including introductions, the opening round and reminding people of the ground rules, can take up to 15 minutes.
- Be clear with the group how much time is being allocated for any exercise or discussion and remind them of the time a few minutes before they must return to the larger group or end the activity. Remind them again one minute before they break up.
- Speed up the small group feedback to the larger group by appointing one person as recorder and one as reporter before the exercise is begun. These tasks may be performed by one person.
- Encourage the recorder to write notes, preferably on a flipchart. Alternatively, the notes may be read back and the facilitator may write them up. Only write up the different ideas to avoid duplication. Acknowledge where each idea came from.
- Plan extra activities to take care of spare time. Allow some flexibility in the plan so that omissions and additions may be made as needs dictate.
- Some exercises may come with recommended times – follow the advice given, otherwise as much time as is thought necessary should be allowed. If the group finishes an activity sooner than anticipated, don't panic. Move on with the programme and add something in later.

## Planning a session

By using the information gathered during the negotiating and contracting phase and considering the guidelines and information given above, the facilitator is now in a position to plan a suitable programme for a specific group. The following framework may be useful:

### Plan framework

The following framework may be used by a facilitator when planning any facilitated session or series of sessions. The facilitator should begin her/his plan by working under each of the following headings:

#### *Overall aims*

What group members want to achieve – both task and process. (For example, to create a plan of work for a year)

#### *Specific objectives*

Details of the aims of the session(s). It helps to break the aims down into constituent parts. So the plan might read as follows: 'To establish the group's needs; to establish the group's priorities'.

#### *Method*

The techniques, exercises and materials to be used. (For example, group discussion, role play, games)

#### *Contents*

- (a) Opening slot (usually called a round where members get to say their name)
- (b) Introductions (to each other)
- (c) Session outline (according to planned objective)
- (d) Each exercise, question and group formation showing allocated time

- (e) Next step slot (chance for group to plan what they want to do next)
- (f) Evaluation slot (opportunity for feedback on session and assessment of achievement of stated objectives)
- (g) Closing slot (particular space to finish the session and close the group)

### Remember:

Before starting any session, the facilitator must read over the plan and check the following:

- Does the plan meet the agreed aims and objectives?
- Is there a sufficient variety of methods so that concentration is stimulated, not dulled?
- Does the plan include situations where people interact and participate actively?
- Is the timing reasonable? Does the plan allow for running over or under? Are break times appropriate? Do they interfere with the flow of a session?
- Does the session follow a logical sequence from beginning to end?
- Does the plan have an identifiable beginning, middle and end?
- Does each part of the session follow on from the one before? Do techniques vary in the plan?
- Will individuals be encouraged and supported by the planned programme?

## Sample plans

### SAMPLE PLAN 1

Designed for the first encounter of a working group that will continue to meet.

#### Aim

- To get to know each other
- To begin working together as a group

#### Objectives

- To discuss the group aims
- To agree on a time-frame for the work to be done
- To agree the tasks and divide them out between members

#### Methods

- Name exercise
- Icebreaker exercise
- Creation of group contract
- Getting to know you exercise
- Trust-building exercise
- Brainstorming
- Group discussion

(Examples of each of the above exercises and games are outlined in Chapter Twelve.)

#### Detailed contents plan:

<i>Time</i>	<i>Activity</i>
8.00pm	Starting time
5 minutes	Introduction of facilitator and of session plan.
5 minutes	Name game: 'I got the pen from . . . who got it from . . .'

\10 minutes	Introductions/icebreaker exercise – in pairs say your name, why you came to this session.
10 minutes	In the large group, each person introduces her/his partner to the group.
5 minutes	Establish expectations of the group. Brainstorm on what they would like to achieve in the session.
15 minutes	Establish what they need to work well together as a group. Brainstorm on good ways of working. (This forms a group contract by getting agreement on the items listed.)
9.00pm	Break (10 minutes)
30 minutes	Large group discussion. List the jobs/work involved in achieving the aims. (Small groups could be used for 10 minutes and then return to the large group to feedback findings. Create a time-frame for these tasks in the large group. Ask people to propose the division of work for the different tasks.)
10 minutes	Recap on the agreements and see that all agree.
10 minutes	Evaluation.
Do a round of completing the sentence: 'What I got out of this session was . . .' and 'What I did not get from this session was . . .'	
5 minutes	Closing round. Each person makes a wish for the group.

1 minute Remind group of the time, place and duration of the next meeting.

10.00pm Close meeting.

### Examining the components of this plan:

#### Introduction slot

When the facilitator introduces her/himself and the session/programme to the group, the introduction should include information on:

- Her/himself, experience, way of working, and statement of how initial contact was made with her/him as a facilitator
- The aims and objectives of the session
- The topics to be covered
- The duration of a session, break times, lunch
- Any other housekeeping details, such as location of toilets, refreshments, telephones

The facilitator chooses how much information to give. It should include enough information for the group members to accept the facilitator, but not too much information which has no relevance to the task of the group, or to the session. Remember the session is for the group's benefit.

### SAMPLE PLAN 2

Designed for workers' support group having its third meeting.

#### Aims

- To support each person

#### Objectives

- To explore particular situations
- To examine issues involved
- To begin to devise strategies for dealing with situations arising at work



**Methods**

- Energiser
- Continued trust-building exercise
- Listening exercise
- Large and small group discussion
- Brainstorming

**Detailed contents plan:**

<i>Time</i>	<i>Activity</i>
8.00pm	Starting time
10 minutes	Opening round of: ‘How have you been since we last met?’
5 minutes	Energiser: Body sculpture (see Chapter Twelve): ‘How I’m feeling about being in the Group.’
20 minutes	Checking in with one other person. (Take 10 minutes in pairs to explore what has been happening in your work life.)
10 minutes	In the large group: brief input from everyone on current work issues.
25 minutes	Agree to spend time on two issues arising – brainstorm all possible effects this issue can have on the individuals, their work and their work relationships.(Let the person/people for whom this is a live issue relate further details as they have recently experienced them.)
20 minutes	If appropriate, break into two groups of four persons (explore the issues more deeply). Encourage people to seek ways of dealing with the issue.

15 minutes	Feedback ideas and further insights to the large group.
14 minutes	Closing round: ‘What would I like to achieve in the next three-week period at work?’ and ‘What do I need to do this?’
1 minute	Group hug to close (if it seems appropriate). Remind everyone of the time and venue for the next session.
10.00pm	Close group.

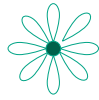


## Spotlight on the facilitator

Ask yourself these questions and set yourself the two tasks at the end as part of your reflection on this section.

- Look at two of your session plans in detail.
- How do they reflect the consultation between you and the group members during the negotiating and contracting phase?
- Did you find yourself in situations where there are misunderstandings over aims?
- Why do you think this is?
- How can you improve your negotiating and contracting with groups?
- Did you keep to your timed contents plan? If not, why not?
- Did you go over or fall short on time?
- Did you make realistic time-plans for the exercises you've chosen to meet the aims of the session? What are the difficulties?
- Design a session and contents plan for one or two groups you will be working with, using the guidelines given.
- Implement these plans and evaluate yourself and the plans.

## Chapter Five



# Learning to Listen

### Topics discussed in this chapter:

- Active listening skills
- Pitfalls
- Barriers to listening
- Developing active listening skills
- Spotlight on the facilitator

Good communication is a two-way process: one person transmits a message and another receives it. Both participants are involved in the communication process. Effective communication is crucial in group work for both the facilitator and the group. When people perceive their ideas or feelings or experiences (or all three) are valued by the group and the facilitator, they contribute more, and this leads to a shared sense of the group acting together. Active listening is the key to effective communication and a core skill for facilitators who should spend time developing this skill.

This section is about developing listening skills and is primarily focused on the facilitator, but active listening should also be promoted among group members.

### Active listening

Active listening is more than simply listening to someone. It is absorbing what is being said and letting the speaker know that s/he has been heard. It is about ensuring that the speaker feels 'listened to'.

The technique of active listening is also used in counselling and consultation settings. As a result, group members may sometimes respond as if they were in those situations. It is up to the facilitator to clarify the limits

or boundaries between what is happening in the group and what might be a more appropriate response for a counselling session (see Chapter Six for more information on boundaries).

The facilitator should keep in mind that s/he is not acting in a counselling role as a group facilitator, nor should s/he expect to counsel. Although there are features in common (attending, listening, empathising) the facilitator must never confuse the two roles. The overlapping conditions of a well-facilitated session and a good counselling session, however, provide an environment where an individual feels respected and valued.

When people are actively listened to, they feel involved and as a result, are more open and participative. For facilitators, therefore, developing and employing the skill of active listening helps to create an atmosphere in which members feel they are an important part of the group. When people experience active listening, they are more inclined to bring their skills, experiences, expertise and ideas into the group relationship.

## Active listening skills

Active listening skills fall into two categories: verbal and non-verbal.

### Verbal listening skills:

<b>Skill</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
Summarising	Drawing together several things a speaker said to make one statement. Check that the summary is accurate. <i>Example:</i> 'So, the three things you are saying are one . . ., two . . . and three . . .?'
Clarifying	Checking that what was said is understood. Such as facts, opinions, decisions, order of events. <i>Example:</i> 'So, what you're saying is that you won't be available on that Friday because of other commitments.'
Reflecting	Picking up on the explicit or implicit feelings expressed by a speaker and demonstrating an understanding and acceptance of these. <i>Example:</i> 'It sounds like that was a very exciting time.'
Paraphrasing	Repeating back to the speaker a little of what was said either in her/his own or similar words. This 'prompt' encourages people to continue. <i>Example:</i> 'So, what was happening at work was confusing.'

Explaining	Giving an interpretation of previous statements. This is helpful if someone is unclear about the meaning of what s/he is expressing. <i>Example:</i> 'It could be that what happened was . . .?'
Open-ended	Asking the speaker questions which will encourage further disclosure. <i>Example:</i> 'What happened then?' or 'How did that affect you?' Notice the difference between these open-ended questions and these which require only a 'yes' or 'no': 'Were you frightened?' 'Did you leave then?'
Encouraging	Includes thanking the person for her/his contribution and offering praise. <i>Example:</i> 'That was a really useful contribution, thank you.' or Using sub-speech to indicate an ongoing understanding of what is being said. These serve as indicators to continue, that the listener is prepared to listen a little longer. <i>Example:</i> 'Mmm . . . uhuh . . . um.hm . . . yeah . . . yes . . .'
Silence	Allowing some time between what a person says before the facilitator speaks. Silence can encourage a speaker to continue, can indicate absorption of what was said.

**Linking** Statements/questions/comments can be linked by the facilitator using short sentences indicating interest, support and encouragement to continue.  
*Example: 'And then?'*

### **Non-verbal listening skills:**

Non-verbal listening skills are rarely used by themselves. They work in conjunction with and enhance verbal skills.

#### **Skill Explanation**

Facial Expression	Our face expresses our emotions. Allow it to do so during a session. The facilitator needs to be able to quickly decide which emotions s/he will/won't express, always keeping in mind the safety of the group.
Eye contact	Expresses interest, encourages a speaker to continue and offers support.
Body language	The way a facilitator stands, sits, and holds her/his body transmits a message of interest or boredom. When listening to someone, the facilitator should lean towards that person slightly, turning her/his body towards the speaker, indicating a relaxed and attentive stance.
Gestures	Helpful gestures include open-handed circular actions which encourage participation; an

open hand while questioning or clarifying; a reaching-out gesture supports a speaker; an open hand or palm towards the speaker says 'over to you'. Head nods encourage someone to continue talking.

**Personal** Leave a comfortable distance between the speaker and the listener. Lack of space or intrusion into someone's personal space can cause discomfort. If intruded upon, someone may begin to move back to maintain her/his personal safe space and many people get distracted when a non-intimate enters their personal space.

**Timing** Do not interrupt a speaker unnecessarily. By using a combination of verbal and non-verbal active listening skills, a facilitator can judge when best to interject.

There are cultural and gender variations in how non-verbal language is used and in the meaning assigned to different movements. Watch women and men operating in groups, to learn the gender variations (for example, women more so than men tend to reach over and touch someone when they are engaged in dialogue). When working with people from different cultural backgrounds, take extra care about getting these messages accurately (for example, some age groups or ethnic groups may find mixed sex groups difficult). Body

language messages may be clarified with the sender; for example, ‘You’re sitting with arms folded and look very cross, are you ok?’

**Pitfalls of active listening skills**

Active listening skills are very valuable and, with practice and supervision, a facilitator will learn to avoid some of the pitfalls listed below.

<i><b>Pitfalls</b></i>	<i><b>Explanation</b></i>
Over-analysing	Interpreting the speaker’s motives. <i>Result:</i> Prevents the speaker discovering her/his motives independently. The facilitator may be seen as a ‘know-all’.
Parroting	Repeating parrot-like what the speaker said. <i>Result:</i> This can be frustrating and insulting for group members and can indicate that the facilitator is not really listening.
Over-expansion	Adding on to what was said or generalising the content of a contribution to the group. <i>Result:</i> The speaker may feel misheard.
Omitting	Ignoring relevant facts, feelings or events. <i>Result:</i> The speaker may feel misheard.

Exaggerating	Intensifying the feelings expressed, or the importance of what was said. <i>Result:</i> The speaker may have to repeat or contradict the facilitator.
Underscoring	Under-estimating the intensity of the emotion expressed. <i>Result:</i> The speaker may feel unimportant or that s/he made an irrelevant contribution.
Rushing	Anticipating what the speaker will say next and saying it for her/him. <i>Result:</i> This prevents the speaker from working at her/his own pace and s/he may feel manipulated.
Lagging	Failing to move on with the speaker to the next item. <i>Result:</i> Members may feel the facilitator is not leading them or is failing to recognise their real needs, and they may become frustrated.

**Barriers to active listening**

There are a number of barriers to active listening. These include:

- Poor environment: Lack of privacy, distractions, noise, unpleasant surroundings.
- Judgemental attitude: In either listener or speaker. Critical negative comment on what is said prevents true listening.

- **Solution-seeking:** If a facilitator is trying to find solutions to problems or concentrates on deciding on what s/he is going to say, s/he is not paying attention to what is being said.
- **Listener's needs:** A listener's own needs/feelings can block active listening. The listener may be so caught up in her/his needs that s/he is unable to get past them to listen.
- **Praise the positive features of the patterns.**
- **Repeat the exercises to begin implementing changes.**

## Developing active listening skills

To develop listening skills, the facilitator must continuously monitor and work to improve them. There are three stages to developing these skills:

1. Awareness and analysis of current technique
2. Recognition of areas requiring work
3. Developing and implementing a realistic programme of skills development

Improving skills means getting feedback on progress. A facilitator may use video or audio tapes or ask colleagues to constructively criticise her/his work. When giving or receiving feedback, the following guidelines may be useful:

- Be specific.
- Give examples of technique.
- Remember, it is the behaviour that is being assessed.
- Choose a good time and place for giving feedback.
- Suggest possible ways of improving or altering the technique.

## Spotlight on the facilitator

Ask yourself these questions and after reflection write down your responses.

### Verbal Listening Skills

Focus on a group you are currently facilitating and answer the following questions:

- Do you use the full range of verbal/ listening skills? (see the list in this chapter)
- Are your interactions taken as part of the flow of the discussions? Do they disrupt that flow?
- Count how many times you interrupt a speaker. Was each interruption necessary?
- Do you finish people's sentences for them? When do you do this? Why do you do it?
- Go through the list of pitfalls in this chapter. Are you making any of these mistakes? How often? What is the cause of this behaviour?
- Using the chart below and your performance at a recent session, rate your verbal skills on a scale of 1-5, using the following 'scores':

1 = stops the speaker (damages communication)

2 = causes a pause (interrupts)

3 = interrupts slightly but doesn't stop session/exchange

4 = encourages (speaker continues)

5 = enables (the speaker goes on more clearly and directly)

*Tick the appropriate box*

Score	1	2	3	4	5
Summarising	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clarifying	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reflecting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Paraphrasing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interpreting/ explaining	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Open-ended questions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Encouraging	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Following	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Silence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Linking	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Non-verbal listening skills

- Observe yourself or ask someone to give you feedback on your non-verbal gestures.
- Are these gestures appropriate? Do they agree with your verbal statements?
- Are any of your gestures or facial expressions giving the message 'stop' to a speaker?
- Is your eye contact appropriate?
- Rate your non-verbal skills on the following scales. Be as realistic as possible. It might be helpful to work on these scales with your supervisor, to give you a second perspective.

Use the same scoring system as before, circle the appropriate number below:

### Facial Expression

- 1 Blank
- 2 Neutral
- 3 Some feeling
- 4 Uses face
- 5 Very good

***Gaze/eye-contact***

- 1 None
- 2 A little
- 3 Some
- 4 Good
- 5 Excellent

***Body language***

- 1 Closed – formal
- 2 Stiff – ill at ease
- 3 Fairly open – welcoming
- 4 Open – encouraging
- 5 Appropriate

***Personal space provision***

- 1 Very poor
- 2 Slightly better
- 3 Adequate
- 4 Enough
- 5 Right

***Timing/Interpretation of talk***

- 1 Always inaccurate
- 2 Often
- 3 Sometimes
- 4 Rarely
- 5 Never

The previous exercises give you some insight into your style and technique as a facilitator and enable you to target areas which would benefit from more work. Make a list of these areas and see if a pattern emerges.

**Devising a skills development programme**

Examining your current bank of skills and assessing them is an important part of the process of developing facilitation skills. The following steps may be helpful when devising a programme for developing your own skills:

- List the skills to be developed from the information gathered doing the above exercises and from feedback from colleagues.
- Propose concrete ways in which you can work on these.
- Suggest who and what will help you in this work.
- List what might hinder you.
- Give yourself a realistic time frame in which to achieve your set aim.
- Set a date to evaluate your progress.
- List the areas requiring further development and plan for them.

Exercises for developing active listening skills:

- Ask a friend or colleague to work with you in a group setting or while watching a video of you at work in a group. Focus on the active skills listed in this chapter. Ask for a reaction to your interactions in the group setting.
- Tape a radio/tv programme. As you watch/listen to the programme, note some of the techniques you feel were appropriate. Analyse your interventions in a group. Compare your style with that of the programme presenter.

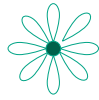


- What messages are you giving non-verbally? (If you do this on videotape, turn down the volume and interpret your gestures without sound. This can be more revealing.)
- Try communicating the following to a friend or colleague, using only non-verbal gestures:
  - ‘I’d like you to finish what you’re saying now.’
  - ‘I’m very interested/surprised/shocked at what you’re saying.’
  - ‘I understand you’re hurt / angry/ frustrated/ furious about what happened.’
  - ‘What you’re saying is boring me/ making me angry/really stimulates me.’
  - ‘I’m glad you’re here/are participating.’
  - ‘You’re not making yourself clear.’
- Practise using the following phrases which enable you to reflect a feeling expressed by a group member:
  - ‘That must have been satisfying’
  - ‘It seems you were quite angry/sad?’
  - ‘If that had happened to me I think I’d feel . . .’
- Practise asking open-ended questions which encourage further contributions from the speaker:
  - ‘What happened when . . .?’
  - ‘How did that work out?’
  - ‘When are you . . .?’
  - ‘Where did you discover . . .?’
  - ‘Why is that the decision . . .?’

- Practise clarifying statements which help the speaker make her/his meaning clear to the group:
  - ‘Would that mean . . .?’
  - ‘Are you suggesting . . .?’
  - ‘Would that help the other situation?’
  - ‘Is that what you would suggest?’

These exercises may be repeated at intervals as you feel the need to check or improve your listening skills.

## Chapter Six



# Working Together

### Topics discussed in this chapter

- Developing participation
- Positive participation
- Poor participation
- Barriers to participation
- Enhancing participation
- Boundaries
- Spotlight on the facilitator

Good facilitation is about encouraging individuals to join in group activities and to co-operate in the achievement of the group's agreed aim(s). At the same time, a facilitator must maintain certain boundaries.

A boundary is a limit, imposed and upheld by the facilitator. Agreed by the group, it may be about keeping time, sticking to certain topics or reaching set aims. For example, the facilitator focuses on the overall objective and ensures that all activity moves towards it and is not side-tracked.

Encouraging individuals and setting boundaries is based on the core principle of equality. Facilitation, by definition, should promote equality. If a facilitator fails to recognise the institutional and personal barriers to genuine participation (and therefore equality), then it will be difficult to generate a climate of equality in the group. This requires a level of self, community and social awareness on the part of the facilitator, so that s/he can bring this knowledge into the sessions. The institutional and personal barriers to participation are further explored in this chapter.

Institutional barriers serve to further reinforce some personal barriers – such that

a focus on each individual developing is only part of the response necessary. Institutional barriers can include laws, rules governing social welfare, access to educational opportunities, public and private services and more subtle barriers connected to attitudes about race and ethnicity, age, social class or class background, sexual orientation, and gender. Personal barriers can include confidence, language, self-esteem, access information, access to services (which can also be an institutional barrier), and education. There is a very strong interplay between personal and institutional barriers.

Historically certain groups of people have had greater access to the resources of a society. And by default, there have been groups of people excluded from full participation as equals in society. Excluded groups include women, working class people, people with disabilities, younger/older people, people of colour (in the western world), lesbians and gay men, ethnic minority people. It has been found that as a rule, people from the excluded groups are more likely to experience personal barriers to participation than people from the dominant or included groups. Facilitators working to create a more equal society need to be aware of these social factors that impact on the individuals within the groups.

Individuals and groups reflect the communities and society they live in and facilitators must incorporate awareness of the social factors at play as well as the group and individual factors that are impacting on participation and equality within any group.

With all groups, it is important to clarify the aim and purpose, to check out the assumptions being made about who might be interested in being involved and ensuring that all can be involved if they want to themselves.

It is important to note, however, that when a group is set up to achieve a certain goal, it invariably excludes some people from the outset. For example, the aim may not be shared by or suited to some people who will then not participate. To participate is a matter of choice rather than a deliberate denial of the right to be involved. On the other hand, there is often deliberate exclusion of some people on the basis of prejudice and inequality, which is not acceptable. When facilitating groups, ensure this is not the reason for the inclusion of some people and the exclusion of others. Be aware and clear about the rationales offered by group members for inclusions and exclusions, and be prepared to challenge any prejudices or assumptions, where necessary.

## Developing participation

The facilitator's job in developing participation is to encourage participation and challenge behaviour which inhibits it. The facilitator is not responsible for what a member chooses to say or withhold in a group – people will not be forced to participate. What a facilitator can and must do is create an environment in the group where people can choose to contribute and where it is safe for them to do so.

Good participation keeps the group together and signals that all is well. Without it, the group task may not be achieved. People will become dissatisfied and neither the group nor

the individuals will develop and the group may disintegrate.

Remember, participation does not mean that everybody must say or do something at every meeting. Over a series of meetings, however, each person is entitled to an opportunity to contribute and it is the role of the facilitator to create these opportunities. In particular, the facilitator must watch out for the subtle ways in which a person can be excluded.

For example: if they are difficult to understand, perhaps because English is not their first language, or the person has a speech disability, or if they find it difficult to express themselves, or if they speak slowly and others are impatient, or if they don't feel confident about what it is they are suggesting perhaps because they are new to the group or the area, or if they feel inexperienced relative to others in the group. The facilitator needs to be aware of the many ways exclusion and non-participation can occur and create situations throughout a meeting that challenge these.

## Positive participation

A sign of healthy participation is when all members of a group have particular tasks, functions, work or roles within the group. Good participation is also recognisable by the types and number of interactions each person has with other members of the group. The facilitator may devise a sociogram, which is a graph that indicates the types and numbers of interactions. It can also indicate who interrupts, who asks questions and who builds on the ideas of others.

Facilitators also use their observation skills and experience with other groups to get a 'feel' for their current group. In long-term groups, a facilitator can build up a picture of participation levels by monitoring those entering and leaving the group, asking why people are leaving and watching how newcomers integrate.

The facilitator may complete the participation picture by asking members periodically how they feel in the group and how they assess the group's work together. This should also occur at the end of sessions and programmes. Developing this type of picture of the group will be much more difficult and less detailed depending on whether the group is a once-off group, a short-term or a long-term group. Whatever its type, participation is a vital issue for all groups.

### Poor participation

Any of the following features occurring in a group suggest that action is needed to redress the balance and improve participation:

- people dominating a discussion
- people excluded from decision-making
- existence of cliques, sub-groupings and caucus groups
- frequent interruption by certain members
- failure to build on ideas from certain people
- dissatisfied members leaving the group
- new members having difficulty integrating
- few opportunities to discuss how the group works
- formal modes of communication which inhibit people from becoming more involved

- gossip and talk outside the group
- no new recruits where they would be expected
- failure to record the information and history of the group
- the group membership not reflecting the make-up of the wider community or of society. This barrier to participation could go so far as to have rules that deliberately exclude some people, thus preventing their full participation, for example clubs for men only, apartheid rules
- the dominance of certain approaches to the work of the group

### Barriers to participation

There are external barriers to positive participation and there are barriers within the group dynamic itself which may cause poor participation.

**External barriers** operate outside the group and prevent access or ease of access to the group. Examples might be a lack of motivation for getting involved because of poor information about the nature of the meeting, or a sense that it is a closed meeting because no invitations to participate are made, or because of a fear in people that they would not be welcome/appropriate. At the very least, there must be an awareness that these barriers exist, along with a willingness and commitment to eradicate them in the interests of the group. For example, stereotypes about people, institutions or organisations may impose limits on who can participate, and it is the facilitator's role to challenge these.

**Physical barriers** include inadequate heating and lack of facilities such as signers, interpreters and wheelchair access for people with disabilities. Access barriers also include challenges about actually getting to the venue for able-bodied people. Does the venue meet the other needs of some people, provision of a crèche, for example? The following questions may help a facilitator to spot specific physical barriers:

- Is the meeting place accessible?
- Is it served by public transport?
- Is it in an area where people, especially women, feel safe?
- What other activities take place in the building or surrounding buildings? These might be intimidating to some people, or they might be giving a false message about the group itself.

**Hidden barriers** may include unchallenged assumptions which hinder group progress. They include unsuitable meeting times, lack of child care facilities, lack of costs for child-minding, hidden costs such as refreshments, or an assumption that the meeting will continue in the nearby pub. These unwritten codes are obstructive, since they exclude, but not explicitly. There may be general agreement that everyone is welcome to a group but those who do not 'fit in' will feel troublesome or unwelcome and their days of participation are numbered. These hidden barriers may be unconscious or deliberate – either way a facilitator should raise people's awareness about the effects that barriers have on participation.

**Social barriers** operate when certain groups of people are excluded for example, when Travellers, older/younger people, women, religious, working/middle-class people are deliberately excluded. It is insufficient to say a group is open to all if, in reality, it fails to be so and actually excludes people. Deliberately excluding groups of people is generally illegal now in Ireland, but there are some exceptions to the law (equality legislation based on preventing discrimination on nine grounds was introduced in 1998 and 2000).

But it is not only deliberately or intentionally that people exclude others – it is through the norms and customs of the community and society, and these may need more challenging and change than the group members recognise. It is often difficult for people who are included to imagine the experience of feeling shy or intimidated about approaching their group. We have all heard the saying, 'but everyone is welcome', and yet newcomers to an area are still not involved. Deliberate welcoming actions may need to be taken to check out any formal rules within the constitution of the group, and invitations of different sorts created to reach out to include people who do not usually participate in the group. Or it may be necessary for a group to look at its membership and ask whether it is reflective of all the people in the community. Noticing who is missing from a group is often the first step to developing a solution so that people do not continue to be excluded.

Sometimes, raising the issues of implicit exclusion operating in a group brings a strong reaction from the participants, which can require further work on exploring their

attitudes, assumptions, values and from this, creating an action plan to be more inclusive.

### Internal dynamics as barriers

Within any group, there will be factors which inhibit or prevent full participation. These include the following:

- Lack of trust among group members can lead to clique-formation with people operating from hidden agendas where there is a lack of genuine communication.
- Ill-defined and badly divided tasks give newer members no sense of where their involvement is leading them. Unfairly divided work means not all members have the chance to develop skills. This is a loss both to the group and to the individual.
- Lack of confidence may restrict more reserved or shy individuals from coming forward with ideas and suggestions. Lack of formal experience in a task heretofore may inhibit some people from volunteering for jobs or positions on a committee. This can be changed through an agreed development plan for all members to address skills, confidence and experience.
- Formal structures for communication may make imparting information/ideas difficult and complicated.
- Over-emphasis on task achievement to the exclusion of personal well-being and comfort can lead to individual frustration and to poor patterns of participation.
- Group members' fears about their ability to participate, about gossip, and about the existence of cliques/sub-groups may contribute to a general unease in the group, thereby inhibiting their own and other's participation.

## Spotlight on the facilitator

Read and reflect on the following and share your findings with your supervisor:

### Developing participation in groups

The first step in attempting to improve participation in your group is to establish its current level. To do this, construct a graph/table (a sociogram) of the interactions/interconnections within the group. Ask the group's permission to observe and analyse their behaviour and use the resulting information for the development of your skills and the improvement of participation in the group. Use the example below as a guideline:

#### Sociogram

Name	Speaks to whom	Idea	Interrupts	Builds	Listens	Encourages
John						
Patience						
Mary						
Pat						
Mya						
Michel						
Ellen						
Miha						

(Other headings might be volunteers, praises, expresses feelings, clarifies, questions, diffuses and so on.)

Choose a session which you think will best suit your purpose. Select the behaviour you want to examine in the group and include each member's name in the left-hand column.

During the session, observe the targeted behaviour and put a tick opposite each name in the appropriate column when a member displays that behaviour. You will need help with this work – ask either a colleague, supervisor or a group member to help you. Otherwise, rotate the role of observer among participants.

The frequency of the behaviour on the part of each individual may then be displayed in a diagram. Use a colour code to illustrate the difference in frequencies, for example, black for once, red for twice, and so on.

A more complex sociogram would include marking in on the column sheet, and later in the diagram, the person to whom the behaviour was directed. The end product would then include a colour coding for frequency and a directional arrow. This sociogram allows the group to see who receives what type of attention in the group. Such information may be used to explore participation within any group.

#### **Sociogram of frequency of speech in the group by each participant**

Black	=	once
Red	=	twice
Grey	=	three times

#### **Sociogram of building on ideas**

Black	=	once
Red	=	twice
Grey	=	three times

#### **Sociogram of interrupting other's speech, who was talking and who interrupted**

Once	=	Talker Interrupter
Twice	=	Talker Interrupter
3 times	=	Talker Interrupter

For example: Pat interrupted Dave three times.

### **Enhancing participation**

Once the facilitator has a clear idea of participation in a group, s/he may use a combination of the following techniques to enhance it at an individual or group level:

- Ensure a contribution from each person by asking her/him for an opinion, statement, feeling.
- Assign tasks in such a way that the same people do not volunteer for all the jobs.
- Form smaller groups and assign people to these groups so that they do not work only with friends.
- Get the group to work in pairs at different times so that people can learn more about each other and participate more easily.
- It can be difficult for some people to work in a large group (6-8 and more) so design the session to break into small groups at times.
- Include trust and confidence-building exercises throughout the group's life (see Chapter Twelve).
- Include exercises where members can reflect on their own and others' participation. Use participants' suggestions and proposals to improve overall participation.
- Include co-operation exercises (see Chapters Ten & Twelve).



- Try to eliminate any external barriers that inhibit participation.
- Challenge behaviour and attitudes which inhibit participation.

Prepare for the arrival of new recruits to the group. Follow this with activities which will stimulate the formation of this new group (see Chapters Ten and Twelve).

## Boundaries

### Drawing the line

'Boundary' is a technical term for a dividing line drawn around various features of a group in order to define limits. Boundaries which affect how a group will work are described below, and refer to a limit which exists around people, time, space, the group and the work of the group. It is often easier to understand where a boundary exists when it has been broken. Individuals operate daily out of their personal space. Depending on the intimacy and trust which exists between people, incursions into that physical space will be accepted or rejected. For example, if someone stands so close that it is uncomfortable, the discomfort or unease felt is an indication that a boundary has been broken. It is a facilitator's responsibility to protect the boundaries in a group.

Ill-defined boundaries foster poor participation. It is up to the facilitator to ensure that boundaries are maintained properly and adequately. Some boundary issues will be discussed and fixed during the initial negotiating and contracting phase, others will emerge as the group develops, and yet others will always remain as issues.

For example, the time that sessions end, division of work between task and process, and each person's contribution are issues which may be negotiated on an ongoing basis.

Some practical boundaries, sometimes called 'housekeeping arrangements', are also very important to establish and maintain, such as timekeeping, attendance, smoking and breaks. The following list consists of a number of boundaries which operate to a greater or lesser extent in groups:

- **People boundaries:** Sometimes participants identify with the group so strongly that they lose a sense of their own identity. The boundaries they experience between themselves and the group are ill-defined. A facilitator must provide opportunities for both individual and team development to ensure these boundaries become more defined.
- **Particular people boundaries:** Someone may identify exclusively with one or two persons in a group. Again, the sense of self is vague. The facilitator works to ensure that people exhibit a wide variety of opinions and skills to encourage as wide a variety of identification between members as possible.
- **Task and process boundaries:** Members frequently merge the functions of task and process, so much so that the distinction is lost. Thus, the task may not be achieved or the process of the group may be ignored. The facilitator draws the group's attention to both task and process to clearly maintain boundaries and the balance needed between them.

- **Ingroup/outgroup boundaries:** Each participant brings her/his experience of community and relationships to the group. It is therefore possible that the group will reflect external divisions which exist in the community/local area from which members originate. If these are brought directly into the group, similar divisions and splits may occur. On the other hand, events outside the group may be ignored while internal events are too highly valued. A balance and awareness of in-group/out-group boundaries, and how they impact on the group, will be kept by the facilitator.
- **Time boundaries:** Time boundaries are important for the smooth operation of any group. The facilitator must keep to the designated time so that members are ready for the close of a session and understand how the group has progressed through the session. This includes timekeeping on the part of participants so that each may participate fully.
- **Facilitator/group member boundaries:** Views differ on this relationship. It is up to the facilitator to decide whether or how s/he wishes to socialise with the group when a session is over. S/he must also decide how much s/he wants to disclose to the group and if s/he meets members outside the group setting. This boundary will vary depending on whether the facilitator is a peer of the group members, has been asked in from an outside organisation, or is an internal facilitator, that is a member of the group.

## Remember:

Techniques to maintain boundaries within groups:

- Encourage individuals to speak with 'I'.
- Get people to work with those who differ from them in some way.
- Demonstrate clear demarcation lines between the task and the process work.
- Encourage members to recognise a contribution, a value, a point of view or the presence of other groups, communities and different methods of working.
- Maintain strict timekeeping. Make sure the group knows the time limit to any exercise. Encourage joint timekeeping responsibility between facilitator and group.
- Monitor the material suggested for use during each session. Is there an attempt to cover too much? Is there enough?
- Remind the group periodically of its contract on working practices and methods (if they have agreed one).
- Introduce rules about taking turns to speak, if required.
- Analyse your own behaviour in the group to ensure that there is no misuse of your position in the group or breaching of boundaries.
- Bring the question of boundaries to the group's attention and ask members to share responsibility in maintaining them.

## Spotlight on the facilitator

Read and complete the following exercise to help focus on boundaries and how to maintain them. Share your findings with your supervisor.

Identify the boundaries in a group using the following exercises to prompt your analysis of the group:

*Circle the number appropriate to your response.*

- Do you complete the material prepared?

- 1 Never
- 2 Rarely
- 3 Sometimes
- 4 Often
- 5 Always

- Do you run over time with some exercises?

- 1 Never
- 2 Rarely
- 3 Sometimes
- 4 Often
- 5 Always

- Do some people get more time in your group than others? Why?

- How comfortable are people about leaving the group when it is time to go?

- 1 Uncomfortable
- 2 A little comfortable
- 3 Fairly comfortable
- 4 Just comfortable
- 5 Very comfortable

- How would you rate the maintenance of confidentiality in the group?

- 1 Very poor
- 2 Poor
- 3 Average
- 4 Good
- 5 Very good

- Can an individual express an opinion or exhibit a value that is different to the group norm?

- 1 Never
- 2 Rarely
- 3 Sometimes
- 4 Often
- 5 Always

- How easily does the group take to new ideas?

- 1 Never
- 2 Rarely
- 3 Sometimes
- 4 Often
- 5 Always

- Can you gather members into sub-groups? How would you describe these sub-groups?

- Who supports whom in the group? Is there a pattern of support and support building?

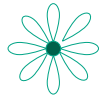
- Does the group spend equal time on its task and on its process?

- If members had a choice would they prefer to work on the task or on analysing the process?

- What level of importance is attached to events outside the group?

- Do you socialise with group members?
  - 1 Never
  - 2 Rarely
  - 3 Sometimes
  - 4 Often
  - 5 Always
- How comfortable are you with self-disclosure?
- How does the group react when you disclose something of your own experience?
- How do you use your own participation within the group?
- How do you use self-disclosure in the group?
- How do members react when you keep a boundary or check somebody for breaching one?

## Chapter Seven



# Difficulties and Conflict

### Topics discussed in this chapter:

- Difficulties in a group
- Warning signs
- Causes of difficulty
- Handling difficulties in groups
- Confronting difficulties
- Techniques for difficult situations
- Conflict
- Warning signs of conflict
- How to handle conflict
- The aftermath
- Spotlight on the facilitator

Sometimes even the idea of difficulties and conflict produces anxiety for both the facilitator and the group members. As a result, problems in a group may be ignored until it is too late or there has been a major confrontation in the group.

It is important to realise that when members of a group genuinely interact, clashes or difficulties may arise. These reflect that the group is living and growing. Difficulty or conflict merely testifies to that fact. These are natural features of group interaction which the facilitator must learn to handle constructively. In turn, the group learns to resolve them. Difficulty/conflict then becomes a point of growth from which participants and the group benefit. Group members must be encouraged to take on responsibility for what is happening in the group. Difficulty in a group is often felt as awkwardness or a discomfort. Difficulties and conflicts should be resolved so that the group may proceed towards its agreed goal.

### Difficulties in a group

Difficulties can centre on the task or the process of the group's work. At times it may centre on one individual, between group members, or on the facilitator. Whatever the difficulty, it will help the facilitator to know the source of the problem to enable her/him to employ an appropriate method to resolve it.

### Warning signs

Groups operate on the two levels of task and process. There are, therefore, two levels at which difficulties may be encountered and it is the context of the behaviour that defines the difficulty. For example, a challenge to the authority of the facilitator may be a sign of an individual coming to a sense of confidence, but ten challenges in a session from that individual would be a warning sign that something is wrong. While problems may be turned to advantage, any group experiencing several of the following patterns will provide an uncomfortable experience for all concerned.

### Signs of task difficulties in a group include:

- not making decisions
- not settling to the task
- going over the allocated time
- failing to reach aims
- not doing what was agreed
- ill-defined aims and tasks
- losing sight of the task
- programme targets missed
- unequal distribution of tasks
- thinking the group is not working/is 'stupid' or unnecessary
- unable to find common ground

### Signs of process difficulties in a group include:

- resistance to group work, people, facilitator
- dependency on facilitator
- challenging authority
- questioning
- not expressing feelings
- opting out of the group
- silence
- domination by one person or a few people
- imbalance of power
- being stuck at a stage/task
- not participating
- marginalisation of troublesome people, of issues
- judging others
- testing and pushing group norms
- not listening

### Causes of difficulties

Causes are not always easy to discover. Very often, there are many reasons why a difficulty has arisen and it is the facilitator's job to untangle and distinguish them. Only then is s/he in a position to develop the strategy most suited to resolving the difficulty. The facilitator is not a fixer. S/he may use various methods and strategies to help people confront a difficulty but s/he cannot fix it for them.

### Feelings

Group members have all sorts of feelings about themselves, each other, the task, the group, their lives in general and the world around them. The spectrum of emotions in a group at any given moment, therefore, is immense. Some of these feelings will be incompatible and may hinder group work or

individual interactions. Thus, feelings can have a negative or positive impact on the group.

### Competition

Competition between group members can encourage greater effort and achievement, but can also create problems with equality, consensus and group cohesion. For instance, members may compete with each other for attention from the group or the facilitator for status, for jobs, or for time to discuss personal issues. The facilitator's leadership may be challenged, so may her/his expertise, experience or status within the group. Other people in the group may want to be the leader. Competition about the task can lead to conflict over who is to do what, exactly what is to be done and to disagreement about priorities.

### Dynamics

In groups, people need to feel they belong and that belonging will enhance them in some way. They also need to retain a sense of their own identity. Problems may arise over the following:

- encroaching on other members' responsibilities, checking on their work, commenting on their contribution
- having too many people do one thing – the sense of achievement and personal contribution of each person is disallowed
- feeling jealous about attention, status, power, position or perks of another
- being uninvolved in decision-making – this can result in the emergence of sub-groups and lead to ill-feeling.

**Inexperience**

Variation of experience can be a bonus for some groups. For others it can create difficulties in assigning tasks and responsibilities. This is especially true where some members have little or no experience of working in groups. This can lead to unrealistic expectations, needs and confusion around the level of participation.

**Lack of clarity**

When tasks, aims and methods are vague, members will likewise be unclear about what is expected of them.

**Individual aims**

People join groups for all sorts of reasons; some join because of the group's aims, others join for personal reasons. People are sometimes assigned to a group and do not necessarily choose to join it. This, too, will influence their individual aims. The facilitator deals with both the personal /individual and the group agenda, and sometimes these will clash.

**Previous experience**

When people have experience of having worked in groups they carry this into the current situation. A facilitator should try to discover the previous experience of participants. If it was a positive experience, then the person might be well disposed to having another positive experience. Negative experiences can disrupt people's perceptions of what is currently happening.

**Outside events**

Events and relationships outside the group will very likely affect those inside; for

example, precarious funding for a group will affect all members, or a sick partner may distract one member.

**Lifecycle of a group**

Certain difficulties emerge at certain times in a group's life, for example when people leave, when newcomers arrive, and so on.

**Pairings and groupings**

Inevitably, some people will get on better with each other and may try to work together all the time. This may result in the formation of cliques or sub-groups and should be discouraged through actively creating the working pairs/ small groups.

**Wider society**

Events that occur in the community or wider society will always impact on a group and on group members. People will have reactions to events which will take different forms – emotional, critical, political, intellectual – and these should be at the least acknowledged within a group. Some events, and the responses to them, create difficulties or conflict within groups, and understanding how outside events impact on group dynamics is essential so that the facilitator deals appropriately with the presenting behaviours and issues.

**Handling difficulties in groups**

Before deciding how to handle a difficulty or its causes, the facilitator must identify the key individuals involved and devise a possible approach before moving into any action.

The approach described here uses a problem-solving technique and involves two stages:



- (a) working out the situation as the facilitator, and
- (b) exploring the situation with the group.

In difficult times the facilitator must be:

- calm
- prepared to confront issues
- unafraid of anger
- resistant to and aware of the possibility of being manipulated by group members
- mindful of the need to be objective towards each group member and their position, holding own opinions aside initially, and working for the group's development. At a later stage, it may become appropriate to voice an opinion, but the facilitator's role is to focus on the individual group members and the group as an entity.

With experience, a facilitator's confidence grows and her/his ability to handle problems develops.

### **(a) Working out the situation**

The facilitator asks her/himself the following questions:

- What is the situation?
- How is this reflected in the group?
- Who is involved?
- Who is affected and how?
- When did this situation emerge?
- What are the possible causes of the difficulty?
- Where and how does the problem present itself?

Reflecting on these questions the facilitator should:

- check out the diagnosis with others,

with a colleague or supervisor. Does this explanation feel right?

- devise a way of confronting or dealing with the situation
- decide how to explore the issue with the group.

### **(b) Exploring the situation with the group**

Some facilitators hesitate about taking time from the 'real work' of a group to address issues of conflict, difference or difficulty. While understandable, it is better practice to work with the group in getting agreement about how to progress through this difference, difficulty or conflict rather than assuming the full responsibility for the decision. Facilitation and group work both emphasise the importance of keeping the three inter-linking spheres in focus at all times – the individuals, the task and the group as a whole. Difficulties and conflict impact on the satisfaction and progress of all three. It is thus part of the role and function of a facilitator to draw attention to 'stuckness', difficulties or conflict.

Time is taken from the other work with the group and permission is sought by the facilitator to deal with the issue. The facilitator makes a clear statement of what s/he thinks the issue is, why s/he is raising it, and what s/he would like to do now. Members are then asked how they think the group is functioning.

People's reactions to the facilitator's statement are requested and feelings are identified. The facilitator must maintain what s/he has seen or can see happening, avoiding the temptation to guess at the motive or cause of behaviour or reactions. The facilitator helps people to listen during this

exploration, making sure people are heard. If it is appropriate, it may help to break into small groups so that everyone has a chance to speak and be listened to.

The issue involved is explored, the facts, events and realities of the situation examined. A record is made of how the situation arose and everybody is encouraged to remember.

The situation is defined with the group. Summary points are made and possible underlying issues discussed.

Solutions are generated within the group. Once everyone is clear on the issue and has an opportunity to express an opinion or feeling, generating realistic solutions will become easier.

A course of action is suggested using the proposed solutions as a basis for that action.

When agreement is reached, the solution is devised and a realistic deadline set, upon which an evaluation will take place.

In some situations, group members may raise the problem. In this case, the facilitator will either handle the situation immediately by facilitating a process similar to that described above, or s/he could ask for some time to think about the situation and to deal with it later. If a group raises a difficulty, then it is usually more appropriate for the facilitator to handle it there and then.

In trying to resolve difficulties, a direct and open approach, which involves members equally in the search for a solution, is the

most useful. This is called 'confronting' but it does not have to be confrontational or argumentative. Confronting may simply indicate the willingness to name and bring issues to the surface in a group. Its purpose is to express feelings and to challenge behaviour, to clear up misunderstanding, to keep issues in the open, and to ensure a clarity and openness in the group.

## Confronting difficulties

To be effective, the facilitator must:

- choose the time and place, ensuring privacy and sufficient time
- be specific about the behaviour
- express her/his feelings about the situation
- use 'I noticed' or 'I observed'
- describe the person's behaviour and its effects on the facilitator and the group
- ask the listener for her/his reaction, listen to this, acknowledge that perspective
- ask for particular behaviour changes
- deal with one issue at a time
- when the receiver/listener responds, the facilitator must not be defensive
- ensure the person has heard properly. If not, comments and requests should be repeated
- be fair – a facilitator may not have the full picture, s/he must be prepared to modify or abandon her/his position when s/he hears more details.

## Techniques for difficult situations

- Encourage silent, non-participating members.
- Focus on the continuing development of trust, commitment and co-operation within the group.

- Work together by grouping people into pairs or small groups, where appropriate. In order to break down barriers, share experience and build up trust. This can also help to lessen the influence of cliques or sub-groups.
- Clarify roles, responsibilities, expectations and the group's agenda. This sometimes allows people to change or develop their positions/roles.
- Model an open, honest and risk-taking approach to handling difficulties. The risk in being honest and direct is that one will be isolated, ridiculed or ignored. This is very real for people, and you help others to take this risk by modelling it. When members recognise these characteristics in you, they will be encouraged to behave similarly.
- Build on the support and positive feelings within the group.
- Talk to a member outside the group-setting in cases where a personal difficulty is causing problems in the group, or where a person has consistently ignored other methods to handle the difficulty.
- Develop support networks within the group. For example, perhaps pairs might work together regularly to support each other. Before each session, ask how people have been since the last meeting.
- Clarify the facilitator's role; ask what members can realistically expect of the facilitator and set the facilitator's limits. The facilitator must be clear in responding to requests from the group.
- Use body language to convey that you will lead, take care of the group and facilitate it to achieve its task.

Establish ground rules with the group. Refer to the contract of behaviour whenever necessary. The ground rules are usually created in the first session, and are written up on a flipchart from contributions by the group members on what they as individuals require of the group to work well together. Everyone agrees to the different rules drawn up at the session and at intervals. This contract can be renewed according to the changing needs of group members.

## Conflict

When positions become entrenched a difficulty in a group may develop into a problem. An example of escalation would be where two people fail to communicate and, as a result, two camps develop within the group. Entrenchment is where a difficulty might involve one person refusing to discuss further a perspective that differs from other group members. Conflict may also be an indication of competition between people which has surpassed a healthy level.

## Warning signs of conflict

Conflict can be seen in:

- the development of elaborate sets of rules and regulations
- the development of norms and myths about the issue
- devising rules about how it can be handled and what will work
- shifting responsibility for conflict resolution to outside bodies or to people in other sections of the organisation
- intense level of difficulties in the group on an ongoing basis.

## How to handle conflict

Most conflict can be handled by employing one or more of the methods outlined for handling difficulties. With bigger issues or problems, the process of resolving the conflict will take longer. Conflicts and difficulties don't disappear immediately. Addressing the root causes often entails changes, which take time and negotiation. Developing facilitator's and group members' skills of confrontation will be an effective approach. When raising the issue with the group the facilitator may use different techniques (see Chapter Eleven). Running a simple, direct and open session will more than likely yield the best results. Always allow ample time so that the issue is fully dealt with.

## Conflict: the aftermath

Once the conflict/difficulty has been raised and resolved, there will be a need to encourage and re-establish trust and safety. The facilitator should use exercises where people can express their feelings about what has happened, preferably one which will enhance positive feelings about the group, or individuals within the group (see Chapter Twelve). It is also useful to take a look at the ground rules for the group to see if there is a need to revise them. Any decisions taken in conflict resolution must be implemented and it is the facilitator's role to see this is done.

## Spotlight on the facilitator

Read and after reflection on the following, share your findings with your supervisor.

Difficulties:

1. Examine two groups with which you work and name the causes of difficulties which have arisen in the course of your work.
2. What has been the impact of these difficulties on the group?
3. What impact have they had on you?
4. What do you think is the pay-off/advantage for any individual or sub-group who brings their difficulties to the attention of the group?
5. How do other group members react to individuals or sub-groups who bring up difficulties within the group?

## Skills development plan

It is useful to have a plan/schedule to develop your skills in resolving conflict. With a supervisor, decide on the areas of work that you need to develop, set realistic targets, and then review your progress at a set time. Working with a colleague or supervisor enables you to build a more accurate picture of your skills and their development.

To help you decide the areas you want to work on, rate yourself on the following items on a range of 1-5, going from least difficult to most difficult. Of the items scored 3, 4 or 5 list these in order of least highest to lowest priority. The results of the following questions will provide you with a personal skills development programme plan.

**Sample skills development: Plan A**

What do I find difficult?

	1 Extremely	2 Very	3 Quite	4 Easy	5 No problem
Questioning					
Undermining					
Challenging the task/plan/ self					
Silencing					
Over-talking					
Storytelling					
Joking					
Interrupting					
Gossiping					
Confronting					
Fixing					
Ignoring					
Vagueness					
Idealism					
Giving feedback					
Cliques					
Pairings					
Latecomers					
Dominating					
Arguing					

Working from the top of the list, target those situations you would like to handle more effectively. Re-read the relevant sections of this book to help you. Develop an action plan to enhance your skills.

For each situation, ask yourself:

- What exactly is the difficulty I have with this situation?
- How do I feel when faced with such a situation?
- Why does this issue/situation/difficulty bother me?
- What do I gain by not dealing with it?
- How will I gain by dealing more effectively with it?
- What steps can I take to handle it better?

### **Sample skills development: Plan B**

Read the following statements and then fill in the blanks as honestly as you can, using this handbook as a resource.

Think of at least three alternatives to every answer and try implementing these alternatives in your work.

After a period of time, review your progress.

When someone is angry in a group:

I usually (a) .....

As an alternative, I could try (b) .....

Another alternative is (c) .....

*If one person dominates:*

I usually (a).....

As an alternative, I could try (b) .....

Another alternative is (c) .....

*When one person is talking too much:*

I usually (a) .....

As an alternative, I could try (b) .....

Another alternative is (c) .....

*When there is disagreement in the group:*

I usually (a) .....

As an alternative, I could try (b) .....

Another alternative is (c) .....

*If someone disagrees with what I have said:*

I usually (a) .....

As an alternative, I could try (b) .....

Another alternative is (c) .....

*When a pair needs to be split up: .....*

I usually (a) .....

As an alternative, I could try (b) .....

Another alternative is (c) .....

*If a sub-group forms in a group:*

I usually (a) .....

As an alternative, I could try (b) .....

Another alternative is (c) .....

*When there is resistance to getting the task done:*

I usually (a) .....

As an alternative, I could try (b) .....

Another alternative is (c) .....

*If people are not talking to each other in a group:*

I usually (a) .....

As an alternative, I could try (b) .....

Another alternative is (c) .....

*When someone brings up inappropriate material:*

I usually (a) .....

As an alternative, I could try (b) .....

Another alternative is (c) .....

*If someone gives advice to another group member:*

I usually (a) .....

As an alternative, I could try (b) .....

Another alternative is (c) .....

*If someone hasn't done what s/he undertook to do:*

I usually (a) .....

As an alternative, I could try (b) .....

Another alternative is (c) .....

*If ground rules are broken: .....*

I usually (a) .....

As an alternative, I could try (b) .....

Another alternative is (c) .....

*When someone breaks the confidentiality of the group:.....*

I usually (a) .....

As an alternative, I could try (b) .....

Another alternative is (c) .....

*If someone is leaving the group:.....*

I usually (a) .....

As an alternative, I could try (b) .....

Another alternative is (c) .....

*If newcomers join the group: .....*

I usually (a) .....

As an alternative, I could try (b) .....

Another alternative is (c) .....



When you have tried some of the alternatives you identified, answer the following questions:

- What is it like to use these new/alternative methods?
- Are you comfortable with them?
- Did you find them useful? Which ones? Why?
- What do you now need to work with these alternative responses?



## Chapter Eight

# Planning and Decision-Making Sessions

### Topics discussed in this chapter:

- Facilitating a planning session
- Sample short-term planning session
- Facilitating a decision-making session
- Sample decision-making session
- Spotlight on the facilitator

Facilitators are frequently asked to work with groups on planning, decision-making and evaluation. These requests are followed by the usual negotiating and contracting process during which the group's aims/objectives are defined. The facilitator then uses that information to devise a strategy which will enable the group to meet those aims. The following guidelines will be useful for facilitating such a session.

### Planning

Plans and planning are integral to the overall work of a group. They involve allocating resources in the most effective and efficient manner possible in order to achieve agreed aims and targets. Plans last for different lengths of time: they can be long-term (five to ten years), medium-term (three to five years), or short-term (one to three years). On the basis of this, organisations then make yearly, monthly and weekly plans. Within these time-plans groups make arrangements for specific events, activities or programmes.

When facilitating a planning session, it is vital for the facilitator to check with the group exactly what is to be planned, the resources available, and who will be involved in the process. Sufficient time must be allowed for the objectives to be met.

### Facilitating a planning session

The aim of a planning session is to draw up a realistic plan, within agreed time limits, which a group may put into effect. Time devoted to each of the following steps depends on what is being planned. The facilitator will carry out each of the following steps in consultation with the group/selected members of any group.

- Clarify what is being planned.
- Define the aims of the proposed activity. Assess how they fit into the group's overall aims.
- Assess the need for what is being planned by gathering relevant information about needs, how they might be met and the people who may be affected. Ask who else provides similar services and how this relates to the group's activities.
- Define the specific objectives of the activity. For example, ask what exactly the group will do.
- Check the costs, materials, premises and staffing implications of the activity.
- Devise an action plan to cover: who will do what, where this will take place, how and when it will be completed, and decide on the priorities within the plan.
- Assess the impact of this action plan on people's work and time schedules.
- Decide how to monitor and evaluate the activity. Decide who will do this and when it will be done.

Then:

- Agree the plan with the group. If further research is needed, decide who will do it.
- Put the plan into action.
- Review the results at an agreed date.

### Sample short-term planning session

This planning session is to devise a three-year plan and may actually take place over two or three meetings.

- Introduce the session and an outline of the proposed planning process (give time/schedule of meetings).
- People introduce themselves and each other and express their hopes for the session, listing any concerns. List these on a chart.
- Group recaps on its aims and objectives and explores the likely context of its work and probable resources.
- Brainstorm all possible activities, events and ideas that could be implemented in the next one to three years. List these on a chart.
- Group selects the probable activities from this list in small group work.
- List is divided among group members; each group of three works on more detailed plans for the activities listed.
- Plans are reported back to the large group. Encourage comments, suggestions and ideas for each plan.
- Prioritise plans/activities.
- Decide what can be done to further each of these plans. Decide on a time-frame and allocate responsibility.
- Recap on decisions taken during the session.

- Remind people of tasks undertaken, the time limit on the tasks, and work outstanding.
- Close the session.

### Facilitating a decision-making session

When a group of people work together towards a common aim, they must make joint decisions, for example how to allocate funds. There are times when decision-making requires all, some or only a few group members to be present. Alternatively, groups may ask an outside facilitator to help them reach a decision, or the group may nominate one of its members to facilitate a session. Having a facilitator who takes on the role of enabler and helper frees each individual to participate fully in the process.

- During the negotiating/contracting stage with the group, the facilitator clarifies what the decision-making issue is. If this is not clear, possibilities are discussed.
- At the beginning of the session, reach agreement on the question/issue to be decided.
- All facts, opinions and feelings about the decision are gathered.
- Examine who will be affected, who should be consulted, and what the financial, legal, practical and organisational issues are. Find out how people feel about the decision: this can be done by asking the group members or using various group formations to help the process.
- Brainstorm possible options.
- Either in the full group or in small groups, discuss and evaluate these options. Decide

which provides the optimum solution. Decide whether the option agrees with the group's overall policy/aim/values. Does the option meet the needs of the people involved?

- Make the decision. This may involve taking a vote or reaching a decision by consensus. Reaching consensus can take a long time. It involves allowing the group members to talk out all the pros and cons, preferences and problems about each option. With consensus, the objective is that everyone agrees with the final option chosen.

Voting is quicker, decisions can be taken earlier and each person has an equal vote. But it involves winners and losers. Choosing to decide by voting requires a number of other decisions prior to the 'real' issue being decided upon!

A decision must be made on whether the vote will be secret or by a show of hands. The group must decide whether the vote will be by simple majority or by two-thirds, also whether it will be in secret or by a show of hands.

A third technique to enable decision-making is to have a double vote where the first step is that people identify what their least favourite option is, and then, having eliminated some of the options, everyone votes for their most favoured option. This is useful if a wide array of options are available, for example, ideas for education courses or for items in the summer project.

Finally, there is the very useful technique of creating a 'preferendum'. This involves giving a maximum of 10 votes to each person

who then distributes them according to their preference between the different options available. This method facilitates people being able to identify the benefits of a number of options open, and who do not want to have to dismiss all other options for one which doesn't fully represent their opinion.

Develop an action plan for the implementation of this decision. A date for informing the group of the outcome of the decision must be agreed, along with a date for evaluating the outcome.

The question of power within the group and the differences between group members in terms of influence and power held requires particular attention and focus from a facilitator when the group is trying to make decisions. In this setting, the participation, inclusion, equality of regard and respect for all members becomes even more crucial so that the decision genuinely reflects the wishes of all the members. A facilitator may need to draw the group members' attention to these issues of power, or s/he may just organise the session in such a way that these considerations are built in to the plan in terms of enabling participation and inclusion of all opinions.

If it is not possible to reach consensus or to have the wishes of all members of a group reflected in a decision, a facilitator will need to change the focus of the discussion so as to generate some movement. A number of useful techniques to generate different conversation can be used to explore what is acceptable to everyone even if this is not the first preference. The question could be, 'What

can you live with?’ or ‘What can you absolutely not live with?’ Both these questions shift the focus away from choosing between options and can enable group members move closer to a decision.

Sometimes, taking a break in a decision-making process can help a group. Staying at a point of decision when none is appearing can be counter-productive after a time. Changing the atmosphere by taking a break can re-energise.

Sometimes, a facilitator is asked for his/her opinion as to what the group should do. Be aware of the power involved in this in terms of supporting a particular opinion within the group and, therefore, potentially silencing some other opinion. The time of giving your own opinion and examples from your experience is a fine judgement, and with awareness and experience it can be done. While the decision rests with the group, the facilitator may have experience to add and to speak from which could be helpful. Being silent is not always appropriate either!

### Sample decision-making session

A group wants to decide which of its activities will attract a grant from an external funding body. This will involve writing a proposal.

- Outline the steps of the decision-making process with the group.
- Identify the dilemma. For which activity does the group think it should apply for funding? List preferences on a chart.
- Brainstorm possible options. List these on a flipchart. Individuals rank these options in terms of preference or needs.

- Create a revised list of options from those ranked (1) in individual rankings.
- Gather information about each option on this list, including cost, availability, accessibility, previous experience with the option, feelings of the group members. Chart each option, with information noted beside it on a flipchart.
- Explore the options.
- Decide on an option, using either a consensus or a vote. Agree this before the session begins.
- Check on feelings about the decision; move on to creating a plan around implementing the decision.
- Recap on the decision and the action plan, including the date for its evaluation.
- Close the session.

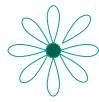
## Spotlight on the facilitator

Consider the following and share your findings with your supervisor:

Look at one planning session you have facilitated.

- List the things that worked well for you.
- List the things that could have worked better.
- Suggest ways in which you feel you could improve this session if you had to do it again.

## Chapter Nine



# Evaluating and Assessing

### Topics discussed in this chapter:

- What is evaluation?
- Stages of an evaluation
- Evaluating content and process
- Choosing an evaluator
- Facilitating an evaluation session
- Sample evaluation session
- Evaluation: Questions
- Spotlight on the facilitator

A good facilitator plans, implements and evaluates her/his work. This critique informs the planning and implementation of future programmes/sessions. This chapter briefly explains evaluation and advises how to develop evaluation techniques, emphasising that the crucial benefit of evaluation for the facilitator lies in the ability to use the outcomes of an evaluation to improve content and process for participants and facilitator alike.

### What is evaluation?

Evaluation is about critically examining two specific areas of group work which have taken place. Firstly, it is about examining the process by which a group has or has not achieved its objectives. Secondly, it is about looking at the individual and collective performances of the facilitator and group members and assessing how they have contributed to achieving the original aims. The information gleaned from an evaluation informs future plans or proposals.

Evaluation should be an in-built feature of sessions, and while it usually takes place at the end of sessions and programmes in a long session or over a period of sessions the timing of actually checking progress

will vary. There is another more informal internal form of assessment/evaluation that a facilitator does continuously when working with a group. An evaluation of how things are going is carried out while observing, directing and facilitating the session. This internal evaluation informs the facilitator's next steps.

A formal evaluation is one completed with the group members and possibly involves an independent person who will make a written evaluation of the work.

The model of evaluation used in this chapter is a very basic one – most suitable for short-session analysis. Evaluation of a major project which has been operating for a long period of time will obviously be a more complex and time-consuming task.

### Evaluation procedure

An evaluation is an exploration of four areas:

1. Acknowledging what has been achieved
2. Recognising how outcomes relate to the initial objectives
3. Agreeing on what could have been better/different
4. Making plans or suggestions for the future based on the lessons learned

The process can be a sensitive one. As a result, the questions which the facilitator asks will depend on group members, how long they have worked together, the nature of the group, and the purpose of the evaluation. The facilitator ensures good listening by each person, encourages validation of each person's opinion, and encourages people to be honest in their feedback.

## Stages of an evaluation

**1. Collating** – gathering information, written or oral, by listening and through exercises. The following questions are useful ones to consider when gathering information from the group:

- What was achieved?
- What went well?
- Were objectives met?
- What was learned/developed/changed?
- How did the group feel about the/each session?

The facilitator's role is also monitored at this stage:

- Did the facilitator keep things running smoothly?
- Did s/he attend to process and task in a balanced way?
- Did participants feel included and valued?

**2. Assessing** – taking time to examine and discuss the information gathered and referring back to the original aims and objectives. The following questions are useful for this stage of the evaluation of the session/programme:

- How useful, relevant or valuable was the experience?
- Did the process work?
- What were the benefits to the group?
- What didn't work well?
- Were the original aims and objectives achieved?

**3. Modifying and Adjusting** – learning from the collation and assessment and from insights into the successes and the areas needing improvement.

**4. Making Plans** – the facilitator draws up for her/himself a list of ways in which the process and content of the session could have been improved. For the group, a list of outstanding areas to be addressed or of future areas of work to be considered is drawn up.

## Evaluating content and process

Evaluation is about observing what works well and what is learned from the group experience. Evaluation involves an examination of content and process.

Questions for examining content:

- Did the overall content help achieve the aims?
- Was the content relevant and useful?
- Did the material (that is, what was written and discussed) clearly make the points it was supposed to cover?
- Was the material accessible?
- Were there any outcomes?

Questions for examining process:

- Did people feel good during the session?
- Did people feel more informed?
- What did people consider to be the benefits of the work?
- What were people uncomfortable with in the group?

Chapter Five elaborates on the group process which can be taken into account during



evaluation. It is also important to note that in a once-off session only one or two questions may be asked or be necessary for an effective evaluation. The facilitator's performance is evaluated separately by the facilitator and also with the group (see Chapter Four).

### Choosing an evaluator

A group may wish to use an outside facilitator to enable it evaluate a programme of work. Alternatively, a group member may be selected to run a session on evaluation. A facilitator may be asked to facilitate the evaluation of the group s/he has led. Choosing who evaluates is an important decision and, whether it means bringing in an outsider or using the existing facilitator, there are pros and cons to be considered.

There will be two perspectives on the group experience: the facilitator's and the group members'. Evaluations often include and highlight both perspectives in order to give a comprehensive picture of any session.

The process of including all viewpoints can vary. The facilitator gives her/his opinion from the perspective of one who has a particular 'providing' role in the group. Any evaluator's views should be objective and independent of all subjective reflections of group members. Comments should focus on information which is useful to the group, avoiding anything potentially destructive to the group or to any individual.

Some evaluation sessions are part of a programme and others exist in their own right. Evaluation questions and time devoted to the exercise will, therefore, depend on

which type of session is under scrutiny. Programme-end evaluations require more time, detail and number of questions/exercises than ongoing assessment/checking-in which takes place throughout any well-planned and well-executed session. (See Jane Clarke's *Guide to Self Evaluation*, and Alan Barr et al's *Community Development Evaluation Skills* for more information and details about undertaking more in-depth evaluations.)

When choosing what sort of evaluator will be most useful and effective for any group, the following pros and cons should be considered:

#### Pros and cons of choosing an independent /outside evaluator

##### **Pros:**

- Will be objective
- Will be experienced
- Will make time to devise evaluation
- Will meet with and clarify objectives for evaluation
- Will write up and present the evaluation

##### **Cons:**

- Will need to be identified and agreed
- Will need to be briefed thoroughly
- Will need to be given time by the group
- Will need access to files/notes/members

## Pros and cons of choosing internal/existing member to evaluate

### **Pros:**

- Will be familiar with the objectives and operation of the group
- Will know her/his way around the organisation/group
- Will not be seen as an intruder

### **Cons:**

- May find objectivity difficult
- May already have a heavy workload
- May not have a lot of experience
- May not have writing skills/analytical skills necessary

## **Remember:**

In evaluation, allow plenty of time for asking and answering questions. A formal evaluation should be included at the end of every session/programme. Avoid rushing this activity in an attempt to get on with other work. This part of a session requires as much attention as any other.

- Let people know from the outset that evaluation is part of the programme.
- The facilitator should employ her/his active listening skills to achieve maximum group participation. Clarifying, reflecting and paraphrasing encourages contribution.
- The facilitator must choose her/his questions carefully, keeping in mind whether this is an end of session or an end of programme evaluation.
- Do not ask too many questions.

## Facilitating an evaluation session

- Following the consultation and briefing process, set the context of the session. Explain what evaluation is and agree on what is to be evaluated. Agree on how this can be done, and ascertain how much time is available.
- Having chosen an agreed criteria, suggest evaluation questions and put these in the form of exercises to the group (see section on ways to ask questions below).
- Establish what was achieved, and what went well.
- Explore whether objectives were reached.
- Decide what could have been better; name what didn't work well.
- Make suggestions for change for the next or for future programmes.

## Sample evaluation session

Task: Complete year-end evaluation of a women's group as part of a community development project.

### **Introduce the session**

- Establish the aims and guidelines, the validity of each person's opinion, the time available, the sequence of questions.
- Conduct a group round of hopes and fears for the session.
- Briefly comment on what is needed to allay fears, for example, trust and confidentiality. (Gather this from the group, if appropriate.)
- Divide the group into sub-groups of three and ask them to make a list of what went well during the past year. (This could also be done in the full group setting.)

- After twenty minutes, get the sub-group to move on to what could have been better during the past year.
- Ask the sub-group to report its findings to the large group. (Record these responses on a flipchart.)
- Conduct discussion of reactions from the full group to the list above.
- Enable the group to explore what can be done to change the 'not done so well' list.
- Lead the group to develop plans and commitment around each of the proposed changes.
- Agree plans for change.
- Recap on the session for the group.
- Do a closing round of: 'How I feel about the group following the evaluation?'

## Evaluation: Questions

The facilitator should be thoroughly familiar with the following exercises before using them in a group situation. A facilitator's evaluation skills include having a variety of questioning techniques at her/his disposal.

### Remember:

When choosing evaluation questions for the end of a session, keep in mind:

- The length of time the exercise will take
- Activities already used during the session
- What is to be achieved with a particular question
- That each participant gives feedback to the group

## Ways to ask questions

### Complete the sentence

Choose a number of the following sentences and write them up on a flipchart, or have them on individual sheets for each member of the group. Ask members of the group to individually complete the sentences. Ask participants to read their responses aloud in the group:

I learned . . .

The best aspect of the session . . .

What I least enjoyed was . . .

What I gained from the session was . . .

The highlight for me was . . .

The low point for me was . . .

I would have liked more . . .

What I'll remember from this session is . . .

Draw a picture/use paints to create symbols/depictions. Use collage either, but do remember to have lots of magazines available for use. Give participants paper and coloured pens/pencils or paints and ask them to capture their experience visually. Drawings can be explained in pairs or by individuals to the group.

## Rating scales

Use some or all of the following headings and ask participants to rate the session on a scale of 1 to 5 ticking the appropriate space.

(1 = very little 5 = a lot)

	1	2	3	4	5
Enjoyed					
Relevant					
Useful			✓		
What I expected					
Interesting					
Varied					

### Body sculptures of feelings

Ask participants to adopt a body pose that expresses their feelings about the session/ programme/group. Ask participants to adopt body poses in answer to the following questions:

- How do you feel now?
- What is your sense of the group?
- How did the group work together?
- How do you feel about the session?

The above questions deal with group feelings and process and this exercise may be used in many situations.

### 'Round' the group

Choose a question and ask each participant to think about her/his response. Ask each person to answer the question within the full group. This exercise demands everyone's attention and focuses the group on the variety and range of individual responses to the same experience. Examples of questions for rounds could be:

- What do you think of this group?
- How do you feel about being in this group?
- What changes would improve the group for you?
- Is everyone equally involved?
- Is everyone listened to?
- Is anyone dominating the group?
- How honest do you think group members are?
- Are you achieving the agreed aim? Why is this?
- Can you describe the atmosphere in the group?
- How does the group deal with difficulties/ differences?

### One word or sentence

Ask each participant to select one word or sentence which describes what s/he feels, what s/he has gained, what s/he will take away with her/him, or what was most relevant for her/him.

This exercise is useful for evaluating a once-off session. Be prepared for strong responses to this. If evaluating an entire programme, participants may see this exercise as an opportunity to release negative comments not previously made in any session.

The facilitator/evaluator could use a rating scale to ascertain satisfaction with practical details or use a drawing exercise of 'How I see myself now' and 'How I saw myself at the start'. Alternatively, a list of future needs could be compiled by asking each person to state his/her future needs in a group round.

When a programme comes to an end, it is important to stress what group members have achieved and to celebrate this achievement. A round of 'What I have achieved/gained from this course' may prove useful. A party or ceremony to mark the occasion is also worthwhile to mark the end of a programme.

By the end of the evaluation session, the combination of methods and questions should provide enough material to spot areas of task or process which need more work, areas which worked well and improvements which could be made to the facilitator's technique. The facilitator should keep a record of feedback so that it can be added to a final and perhaps written evaluation.

## Spotlight on the facilitator

Consider a recent evaluation which you have facilitated. Reflect on the questions below and share your findings with your supervisor. As a facilitator you may have dilemmas around using evaluation within your work. The following questions will help to explore your feelings towards evaluation and how evaluation in your work could be developed:

- Why do I use evaluation?
- Is there someone with whom I might discuss the feedback from participants?
- Is this useful, relevant or breaking confidentiality?
- What are my feelings during a feedback session?
- What questions do I ask at the end of a session?

List all the questions you have asked recently. Ask yourself:

- Why did I ask that question?
- What answers did I get?
- Did I alter my methods/content as a result of the response?
- What methods do I use to evaluate sessions?
- What other methods could I use?
- How could my use of evaluation be more effective?

When it comes to altering plans based on the results of an evaluation, how flexible are you on a scale of 1 to 5?

1 = not at all flexible

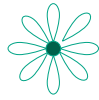
5 = totally flexible

Devise an action plan for using evaluation within your work:

- Set out objectives.
- Decide on a time-scale.
- Decide when and how you will check back with your supervisor on your progress.

Look at one evaluation session you have facilitated:

- List the things that worked well for you.
- List the things that could have worked better.
- Suggest ways in which you feel you could improve this session if you had to do it again.



## Chapter Ten

# Working with Diversity and Complexity Issues

### Topics discussed in this chapter:

- People with physical disabilities
- People with learning difficulties
- Young/older people
- Peers
- Single or mixed sex groups
- Single or mixed social class groups
- People from varying ethnic or racial backgrounds
- People with differing sexual orientation
- Spotlight on the facilitator

To contribute to a more inclusive and quality-focused society, we all need to be aware of the issues and needs affecting all people in society and not only those of our own geographic or social community. Generating inclusive participation in the group setting is a key element of the role and function of a facilitator. A second key feature is to bring an awareness of these equality and non-discrimination issues to all work and social interactions. In this way, we contribute to a culture which is more inclusive. Positive action measures can then be developed to enable all people contribute as a matter of principle rather than exception and/or favour.

In most societies there are differences between people, which have resulted in some people being treated less favourably than others, and some people benefiting from those differences. The differences are naturally occurring between people, but structures in society have been created so that these differences result in discrimination, inequality and lack of equal opportunity. These structures and ways of grouping people are maintained both by laws and rules and by attitudes, beliefs, values and

principles. These structures reflect economic, political, social and cultural spheres of life and are then recreated by each generation through the set of beliefs and values of that society. These beliefs usually suggest that the structures and divisions within society are 'natural' or even 'god-given'. It becomes difficult to question these beliefs, even though they support inequality and unfairness.

To create social change to bring about a more equal society requires changes in the structures, the political, economic, social and cultural institutions and practices and, very importantly, in the interactions between people being based on a set of beliefs which values everyone equally and which welcomes diversity.

As facilitators working to contribute to a more equal society, the task is often at the level of personal interactions, challenging discriminatory comments and behaviours, and working to increase people's understanding of how exclusion and marginalisation operate to the detriment of everyone in society.

Facilitators will usually have a double-faceted task in any group. One facet will be to work with the dominant set of beliefs and attitudes and challenge those that are discriminatory or excluding. This will require work with individuals who express those beliefs and attitudes that reflect prejudice.

The second facet of the work will be to work with particular individuals who have experienced discrimination, exclusion, marginalisation, and who may require additional supports to fully engage equally in group settings.

In any group there may or may not be individuals who come from a group that has been traditionally excluded. Regardless of whether a particular excluded group is represented in a group or not, a facilitator should work to increase awareness of the needs that group might have, so as to contribute to a shift in thinking about the beliefs, attitudes and possible prejudices in relation to that group.

Within the current equality legislation framework, the grounds on which people can not be discriminated against are: gender; age; marital status; family status; religion; sexual orientation; race; membership of ethnic group (including Travelling community), and disability. These grounds reflect the reality that people are discriminated against and individuals and groups of people are excluded from fully equal participation in society because they are older, lesbian, disabled, etc.

Facilitators will frequently be asked to facilitate groups whose members may have specific needs. This section deals with situations requiring specific facilitation skills to meet such specific needs and suggests additional preliminary questions that might be asked to ensure that the facilitator performs effectively. These considerations should be included in the facilitator's everyday work so that s/he is not making assumptions about people that inhibit their participation. (See Chapter Six.)

Learning difficulties, language considerations, literacy and attention spans are important considerations for all groups. For example, the facilitator must ask her/himself if everyone will understand the language used throughout the

session or whether interpreters are needed. (If the session needs to be conducted through two languages, then remember extra time will be required.)

There has been an historical bias in favour of certain groups in society, for example, white, male and middle class. This is being addressed in community development and equality settings. One factor which has emerged from this redressing work, is the danger of 'reverse discrimination'. This is a situation where a person from what is traditionally perceived as a discriminating group is assumed to reflect the attitudes of that group and is therefore excluded from involvement. For example, a middle class person may not be considered for involvement in a community development group, or a settled person in work on including Travellers in a community. A facilitator must be aware of over-compensating for the power imbalances that operate in society.

Situations discussed in this chapter include the following:

- Working with people with disabilities
- Working with people with learning difficulties
- Working with young/older people
- Working with peers
- Working in single or mixed gender groups
- Working with mixed or single social class groups
- Working with people from varying ethnic or racial backgrounds
- Working with people with differing sexual orientations



It is rare that a group will not be a mixture of a broad range of people who reflect the diversity in society. A facilitator may, therefore, be working with a very complex mix within a group of people with different needs – perhaps even, needs that might seem to be in some conflict. Secondly, people are not one dimensional – there may be individuals who reflect a number of different needs simultaneously, such as a lone parent with a disability, or an older gay man, or a young man with a learning disability.

Facilitators will be working in more complex situations as society continues to be more aware of the various needs that are inherent in any group. While the work can be more complex, accurately reflecting the diversity and realities of society contributes to a more useful outcome from any facilitated work.

### **Working with people with disabilities**

The facilitator should check the games and exercises selected and ask the following questions:

- Are they appropriate for this group?
- Is there a need to make alternative arrangements so that everyone can participate?
- Is a signer needed for those with hearing difficulties?
- Is modified equipment needed?
- Are toilet facilities and access to the room suitable for everyone?

### **Working with people with learning difficulties**

- Do methods of work accommodate the literacy and numeracy abilities of all members?
- Are methods available which are less reliant on writing, reading or counting?

### **Working with younger/older people**

- Does age composition influence use of materials, methods and techniques employed in group work?
- Do resources or materials reflect the age group and abilities of the group?
- Do facilitation methods suit the age group? (Channel the high energy of younger people into exercises or games rather than trying to contain it. Older people sometimes have a gentler rhythm.)
- Does the pace of exercises allow for the varying attention spans? This is particularly relevant when working with an age group that is new for the facilitator.

### **Working with peers**

Peer means the facilitator's friends, neighbours or colleagues. It is her/his choice whether or not to opt to work with peers. Some facilitators find that ready-made links mean less work in creating an open and trusting environment; others find this more challenging when trying to overcome difficulties that may emerge. The facilitator's role in this situation will be different from the role s/he might have with these same peers in other situations.

### **Boundaries**

Setting boundaries between the facilitator and the peer group could raise questions of confidentiality, favouritism, comfort level and acceptance. The facilitator needs to maintain a strong boundary between the previous relationship s/he may have had with a peer and the new relationship which takes place within the context of the group.

### **Rivalry**

To boost their self-esteem, some people criticise others. Working with peers may provoke jealousy in group members, leading to covert/overt questioning of the facilitator's ability.

### **Payment**

If a facilitator decides to work with friends, s/he should make sure from the outset that the amount and method of payment are clear. There can be a tendency to overlook payment which may indicate an undervaluing of the facilitator's work.

### **Lack of support**

Familiarity and lack of awareness may permit members to dismiss the facilitator's proposals or plans.

### **Nervousness**

The facilitator may feel more nervous or anxious than usual when working with colleagues because her/his status and role is different.

### **Working with single or mixed sex groups**

No one is neutral when working in groups. The facilitator's gender, her/his gender in relation to that of members', and the composition of the group in general all influence the process and task in progress.

If difficulties arise in relation to sex (such as negative comments being passed about someone's sex or gender), then address them immediately. Do not allow them to become problematic. Having one woman or man in an otherwise all male or female group brings its own difficulties. Being treated as a representative of one's sex can be isolating. When the facilitator is alert and aware of what is happening in the group s/he can have a positive influence on the group dynamic.

It is important that the facilitator knows whether it is best that groups work in either single or mixed gender settings. The following guidelines should enable the facilitator to weigh up the pros and cons of working in either grouping:

### **Expectations and roles**

Social conditioning has led many of us to expect different behaviour from women and men. The facilitator should check her/his own attitudes and watch what is happening in the group in terms of the norms and attitudes about gender issues.

Analysis of roles in mixed and single gender groups reveals that women and men behave differently depending on which group type they are in. The facilitator should focus on her/his own behaviour as facilitator. Concentrate on giving balanced attention to both genders and be wary of casting members into stereotypical roles or allocating tasks that may not suit them.

### **Task and process**

Research shows that women and men differ in how they approach the task and the maintenance of a group. Women may be seen as 'doers' and men as 'planners'. Try to avoid

reinforcing these attitudes within the group by varying role and responsibility allocation.

### **Difficulties and conflict**

Women's way of acknowledging difference revolves around one-to-one exploration, while men frequently acknowledge through the group. The facilitator must bear this in mind when attempting to have full participation of all members.

### **Energy**

Each group displays its own characteristic energy. Some facilitators prefer the rhythms of single sex groups where it can be easier to generate trust, openness and a common bond.

Women and men often set different values on their contributions in a group setting. Sometimes women undervalue their contribution.

### **Attractions**

Group members can be attracted to each other in either single or mixed gender groups; members will also strike up friendships. The facilitator should be mindful of this in allocating teamwork tasks.

## **Working with single or mixed social class groups**

Class background describes our social origin. Traditionally 'working class' and 'middle class' differentiated people according to their paid work. Today, however, these definitions do not hold as strongly and class most often refers to the background of a person's parents, which would have been defined more by the nature of the paid work, e.g. doctor, plumber, hairdresser, teacher, shop owner.

Social class descriptions also refer to educational aspirations, experiences and opportunities, access to social institutions and agencies, to health and welfare services, to social networks and aspirations, and to type and location of housing and material possessions.

While there is discussion and debate about the absolute purity of social class definitions, differences nevertheless on the basis of type of work, training, educational aspirations and social culture do continue to exist and have major impacts on individuals and groups of people.

Historically, working class people have experienced disadvantage in these areas in comparison to their middle-class counterparts. Positions of power and decision-making, the control of and access to them, as well as the distribution of resources, have been disproportionately accessible to the middle and upper classes.

The facilitator must recognise this social reality as it manifests itself in the group. While class difference can cause difficulty, it is not an automatic result of working with mixed or single class groups, or of the facilitator's differing class background. The facilitator should use her/his awareness and knowledge of class issues to encourage participation in the group.

In particular, facilitators must work with awareness of people who experience poverty and how this has impacted on their lives – lack of opportunity, access, equality, and participation in community and society.

### **Stereotyping**

Stereotypes exist of people from different classes. In the group this may cause problems, or these differences can be put to good use to widen the range of approaches adopted to achieve the group's aim. Stereotyping inhibits genuine interaction and may manifest itself in the group through snobbery, trouble-making, putting down or dismissing some people, or not being interested in listening to others who are not from the same class background or gender.

### **Values**

Class background can determine the value set on certain events, people or activities. Obviously, differing sets of values will affect group decision-making and planning but if addressed adequately, will not inhibit the achievement of the group's aim or goal.

### **Social mix**

Mixing social classes can inhibit some and encourage other types of behaviour. Both facilitator and members must acknowledge class difference where it exists. Only then can strategies be devised to counter the negative effects of a class clash and enable the group benefit from the broader experience of all class backgrounds.

### **Self-esteem**

A middle-class person in a predominantly working class group might question her/his contribution and a working-class person may not be as confident about her/his contribution in a predominantly middle-class group. But, given the status placed on middle-class values, this person may be less worried than a working-class counterpart in a similar situation.

### **Working with people from varying ethnic or racial backgrounds**

Groups may replicate the social and economic dominance of certain groups in a society. For example, in the northern hemisphere, white, middle-class, male, heterosexual values dominate. This leads to negative and damaging stereotypes of values other than those that conform to this norm. Prejudices, discrimination, inequalities and an undervaluing of any value outside the norm will occur where negative attitudes are not dealt with. With equality as a core value the facilitator must challenge such stereotypes.

In Ireland, Travellers are an indigenous minority group affected by this discrimination. The dominance of the settled community has led to the exclusion of the Travellers' perspective from most issues. While the settled community will always be numerically larger than the Travellers community, an equal society would recognise the particular social and cultural factors of both groups, would accord equal treatment to both and would ensure that Travellers are not discriminated against because they belong to a minority group. Numerical dominance and socio-cultural dominance are not equivalent, although they do sometimes go together. For example, while there are more women than men in the world, women are discriminated against and face inequalities in relation to men.

More recently, many other ethnic minority groups have moved to Ireland. White, settled, Christian and western beliefs and values may contribute to the exclusion of these other perspectives also.

There has been much development in the past ten years to counter this prevailing cultural set of norms and most facilitators will find an openness among some members of their groups to inclusion and embracing perspectives different from the dominant culture.

In the group situation, inter-connections between minority and dominant cultures require special consideration. The facilitator should discuss these at the consultation stage.

The following factors will exist even if the facilitator or a single group member is the only member present from a different ethnic or racial background:

### **Equality and inclusion**

Regardless of whether Travellers or people from other ethnic groups are present in a group, equality and inclusion are still relevant. Access, openness and the awareness of all/ other perspectives are steps towards ensuring equality regardless of whether anyone in a group is of a minority group in the dominant culture. This is so that the set of beliefs of the dominant culture can be challenged and made to be less dominant!

### **Stereotypes**

Members of minority ethnic groups are frequently stereotyped. The facilitator encourages the recognition and challenging of negative stereotypes. Similarly, people from ethnic groups will also stereotype the dominant group and this will also need to be challenged.

### **Expectations**

These will differ according to ethnic background and could lead to different levels of participation, cohesion, identification with

the aims of the group, or with acceptance of contributions.

### **Discrimination**

Stereotypes and prejudice lead to behaviour that actively discriminates against people who are perceived as being different. This behaviour may take the form of verbal, psychological or physical abuse, exclusion and/or unequal treatment.

### **Working with people with differing sexual orientation**

People often make assumptions about others on the basis of their own life experience. This relates to all the issues discussed in this chapter. People may presume they know the sexual orientation, lifestyle or aspirations of others.

### **Exclusion of other sexual options**

Heterosexuality is the dominant sexual preference in society, but lesbianism/ homosexuality and bisexuality are also preferences for a large number of people. Not naming these as possibilities results in perpetuating the silence around the issue and the invisibility of lesbians, gay men and bisexual people.

### **Homophobia**

The expression of fear/dislike of lesbians/ gays/bisexuals through negative comments, behaviour and decisions must be challenged and explored with the group by the facilitator, if and when it occurs.

### **Assumptions**

Assumptions about the sexual preference or lifestyle of people in the group can result in lower participation, conflict and hurt.

## Remember:

In the group:

- Where appropriate, challenge stereotypical comments.
- Encourage women and men to become aware of and understand traditional roles and behaviour.
- Use anti-sexist and gender neutral language.
- Focus on patterns of interaction and behaviour and name them for the group.
- Ensure that equality and inclusion are emphasised within the group.
- Encourage examination of attitudes, beliefs and values in relation to people from 'other' class backgrounds.
- Develop an awareness of the positive and negative features of different backgrounds and impart this awareness to members.
- Bring issues of sexuality/sexual orientation to the notice of the group.
- Challenge discriminatory remarks or behaviour.

## Spotlight on the facilitator

Take your time when working through any necessary changes in your work. If you are open to challenges, you will find yourself developing your awareness and skills.

### Recognising difference – skills development

- Compile lists of some positive and negative images, assumptions and beliefs you have of women, Travellers, people from Africa, people from Eastern Europe/ Asia/ the Phillipines, working-class people, middle-class people, those living in a rural setting,

people living in poverty, those living in an urban setting, people with physical disabilities, lesbians, gay men, married people, single people, separated people, parents, older people, people with large families.

- Explore how gender, class, ethnic and racial background have influenced your life.
- Explore your class background and identify its inherent beliefs and value system. What impact have they these beliefs had on you? Can you express your current beliefs and value system? Is there any difference between your current values and the ones from your background?
- Do you prefer working in single/mixed/or opposite to you sex groups? Why?
- Do you prefer working in the same, mixed or different to you class groups? Why?
- Do you prefer working in the same, mixed or different to you ethnic groups? Why?
- What are the benefits and losses to you (and to a group) when working with any of these groups?
- Are there any differences in how you treat people who are older, younger, of the same or different sex, sexual orientation, social class or ethnic group, or who have physical abilities or disabilities?
- Observe and get feedback on your verbal and non-verbal interactions with group members.
- Using the answers to the questions above, decide how you can develop your awareness and behaviour.
- Work with a colleague or supervisor on this. Devise an action plan. Put it into effect.



- If your gender, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation is different from the groups you work with ask yourself why do you think you were asked to work with them.

### **Working with peers – skills development**

Before you meet a group ask yourself:

- How do you feel about working with your peers?
- What issues might emerge in this situation?
- Have you worked with this group before?
- What did you learn from the experience?
- What do you think might be the issues for each of the group members?
- How can you and group members maintain adequate boundaries?
- What will the relationship between you and your peers be like when the work is completed?
- How can you ensure that confidentiality is maintained after the group has disbanded?
- What are your expectations of your peers? (Think in terms of group behaviour, roles, participation and support).

During the lifetime of the group ask yourself:

- How can you ensure maximum co-operation and support?
- How can you safeguard and develop confidentiality within the group?
- If someone breaks a boundary (or appears to do so by, for example, refusing to take part in a session because you know what they think, or they arrive late because they know the facilitator), how might you respond?

- How can you avoid being too formal, strict or distant with the group as it attempts to achieve its task?
- How can you avoid being over friendly?
- Is there anything you could discuss with group members or the organising body before the group begins to meet?

When the group session has ended, ask:

- How can you ensure that confidentiality is maintained?
- If a group member asks you to talk about what happened in the group after the work is finished, how will you respond?
- How did you find working with your peers? How did you feel? What issues emerged for you?
- What have you learned from this experience?
- How will you handle requests from the organising body for a post-session analysis?



## Chapter Eleven



# Choosing Materials and Methods

### Topics discussed in this chapter:

- Factors affecting choice of materials
- Factors affecting choice of techniques
- Methods and ways of working with groups
- Visuals
- Spotlight on the facilitator

There are many factors to consider when attempting to select appropriate methods and materials for sessions or programmes.

### Factors affecting choice of materials

People have different intelligences which are stimulated by different learning styles, techniques and methods. For example, some people learn best by doing, others by following examples, yet others by using trial and error, and others again by reading and discussing.

To stimulate people's different approaches to learning, facilitators and trainers need to use different techniques, for example, visual, verbal and practical methods of presenting material. As a facilitator, it is important to include a broad range of techniques in your repertoire so that the work undertaken with groups can stimulate the different intelligences of the group members.

Accessing the strengths of all of the group members by attending to the methods and materials used also contributes to a fuller set of outcomes from the group's work. Language and culture are two other elements to attend to when selecting materials, exercises and designing a session, as discussed earlier.

### Aims

The facilitator must choose exercises and methods which meet the aims of both the task and process.

### Ability

The facilitator should check the literacy and numeracy levels of every group. Are there people with particular physical or learning disabilities present? Is it possible to experiment with song, dance or drama? Would a more traditional method suit? Tapping into the creative side of people can empower, break barriers and shift energy.

### Resources

The facilitator should discover what materials and resources are available and match these with what the facilitator might have, such as flipchart paper or markers. If there is a dearth of resources or materials, participants may be asked to help out. If there is money available from the organisation or from the group, there are some pre-packaged exercises, board games, paints or music which are purpose-built for working with groups – see the reference section at the back of this book.

### Culture

Some activities may be culturally inappropriate for particular groups and the facilitator should be aware of this. For instance, touch exercises in some settings may not be appropriate.

### Experience

Methods and exercises should be tested out by the facilitator with colleagues or friends before s/he uses them with a group.

A facilitator must never ask a group to do what s/he would not do, or to participate in an activity or exercise that s/he has not previously completed/tried out.

### **Challenge**

Using a variety of techniques ensures that boredom does not feature in any session and that repetition is avoided. People are stimulated and challenged by variety.

### **Factors affecting choice of technique**

New techniques should be introduced gradually by the facilitator. If there is resistance to a method, it should be sparingly used to begin with. With the group's permission the facilitator may gradually introduce it more and more into the programme.

### **Stages**

Some exercises will be more effective at particular stages of the group's development. The facilitator should take advice on this matter from her/his supervisor. For example, role play can cause great resistance to the group process if introduced too early in a session/programme, or introduction exercises are not necessary when a group has worked together for a long time. With group members possibly new to the facilitator, a better technique would be a simple name exercise for the sake of the facilitator rather than a more complex exercise.

### **Back-up**

In any facilitation setting, there should be a store of games and exercises which the facilitator is ready to draw upon in the course of a session or programme, in the event that some free/spare time arises.

## **Methods and ways of working with groups**

There are many ways a facilitator can introduce material or gather information, ideas and thoughts from members. The following list of techniques can be viewed as tools which enable the facilitator and the group to move nearer to achieving the agreed aim. They are not an end in themselves and must be structured into an appropriate contents plan.

**Brainstorming** is a quick listing of first thoughts and reactions to an idea. Have a large sheet of paper and marker ready to note these down. Encourage spontaneity. This is useful at the beginning of a session to initiate thoughts to be worked out more fully by the group members.

**Small group discussion** involves people examining an issue. Decide on an issue. Assign a reporter to each group. Set the time limit. The facilitator may choose to sit in on groups or not. Small group discussions are useful for further exploration of identified issues, practical decision-making, action-planning or full discussion by a small number of people. Encourage people to respect one another and to stay with the discussion topic if using this method.

**Small groups** give everyone a break from the large group and help to generate discussion and stimulate participation. There are various techniques for assigning people to small groups. Working in pairs is useful for in-depth work, for personal exploration and for self-analysis. Ask people not to always work with the same person, or with someone they know.

**Small groups** generate discussion and ideas and help develop strategies for action. Assign people to small groups by calling letters, numbers, fruits or animals. Ask the same letters (numbers, fruits or animals) to work together. So if you want three groups, call As, Bs and Cs (or apples, oranges and ears). All As work together and so on.

**Fish bowl** is a seating arrangement where half the group sits in a circle and works together on something. The other half sit outside this circle, observing the inner circle. The fish bowl is useful for listening, resolving conflict, discussion, observation and supervision exercises. Some people might find this a threatening seat formation. It should be used carefully and with groups who are ready for this method.

**Large group** discussions are useful for holding general discussion, airing views, giving information, seeking proposals, agreeing plans, generating energy, building trust and exploring expectations/hopes. Encourage maximum participation. Make sure everyone has an opportunity to contribute. The facilitator should not spend too much time in this formation, as attention spans are short in this setting.

**Plenary sessions** are when the full group hears what went on in smaller groups or when information is imparted or an input given by the facilitator/speaker on an issue. This gives a sense of what is happening in the overall group. Each small group has a reporter and recorder who outline the conclusions of the group within an agreed time limit. The facilitator ensures that everyone can hear

and see what is going on. Plenary session formation can allow the facilitator to lead into a large group discussion. This method is most useful as a reporting back method.

**Simulation exercises** are where people complete a task and then discuss how they did it, how they worked, what went well, what they need to improve. An observer may be used to provide an 'objective' perspective on what happened in the simulation. A facilitator can design a specific simulation exercise, or use available pre-designed exercises. The purpose of simulation is to have a common group experience which is then analysed according to the developmental needs of the group.

**A team-building exercise** may be used, such as pretending to be the last five people on earth faced with room for only two people in the last spaceship heading for safety before the planet explodes. The group simulates coming to a decision about who gets to go in the ship. Looking at how people operate together and separately when completing a team exercise can be informative and fun.

**Case study** is where the facilitator brings in the details of a real situation and asks the group members to address their inquiry towards the dilemma outlined in the case study. This is a very useful method for getting people to concentrate the focus on a real situation. The facilitator needs to ensure no details are included that would identify any person or groups, as these form part of the confidentiality that is to be maintained at all time.

**Role play** is where people act out a situation. When the 'drama' is over, the main person

in the role play hears how effective s/he is from the other 'actors'. The role play can be performed again or until the main person is satisfied with her/his behaviour. Role play requires a level of preparation and de-briefing afterwards, and this must be considered in terms of time-planning a work session. Role play is very effective as a technique for practising skills, trying other options, exploring resistances and developing a broader understanding of other perspectives. It can also be inhibiting to some people who don't find it 'real', and can stimulate strong emotional responses towards other group members. It is essential to de-brief or de-role and to spend time in relating awareness that people were 'acting in role' and not necessarily themselves. It is useful to have people say their own names and be recognised as themselves by everyone else in the group before moving on to the next element of the session.

**Role reversal** is where the main actor takes on the role of another person in a chosen scenario. This helps the actor to experience an event or issue from another perspective similar or different to her/his own. The exercise can broaden perspectives and deepen understanding. For example, a group member is told to play the part of her/his mother and to tell another actor s/he will not be able to visit on Christmas Day. Thus, the member gets the opportunity to act out being her/his mother.

**Written exercises**, when used, pre-suppose a solid knowledge of the group's literacy level. If using handouts, the facilitator must make sure that there are enough and that a plentiful

supply of pens, paper and places to write are available. Enough time must be allowed, particularly when exploring creative writing.

**Skills practice** is where individuals use a newly acquired skill and get feedback from the group or from another individual on their performance. This can be done in small groups or in pairs. For example, the skill might be practising saying 'no' to someone's request.

## Visuals

Slides or photographs provide information about other people or situations, or they can record the group's work, activities and achievements. Visuals can be used to tell personal and group histories or may be part of an evaluation.

**Flipcharts** enable the facilitator and the group to chart the progress of a particular session. Make sure the writing is clear and legible. Any instructions or flipchart notes for the group session should be prepared before the session. The facilitator should face the group and ensure that everyone can see. This is a very popular method especially for taking feedback from group work, combining visual and participatory methods.

**Overhead projectors** are useful for large groups (over 15) for giving information to groups and in a lecture/large seminar setting. The equipment should be checked before the session and the facilitator should be familiar with its operation.

**Powerpoint** is another commonly used visual tool. It is useful for giving information to groups and in a lecture/ large seminar

setting. Ensure you are familiar with the technology and also that you have a back-up prepared, just in case!

**Videos and films** stimulate, inform and entertain. For group work, they should not be too long. Anything over thirty minutes will challenge concentration. Structured discussion is required afterwards.

**Leaflets or information sheets** are useful for dissemination of information to those who wish to keep such information in a permanent format. Material may be read through and the contents discussed.

**Drawing** can be good fun. It releases creativity and allows people to express themselves in a way other than through words. Ask people to describe their drawings to other group members. Use this to explore hopes, expectations, fears, present situation, fantasies and evaluation.

**Collages** made out of magazines and newspapers, which represent members' images of themselves, or expectations, or fears, can facilitate personal and group exploration or evaluation.

**Graffiti boards** are blank sheets of paper, card, or board on which people can write comments on group issues. These may be signed. Graffiti boards can be useful to allow group members to express themselves in a concise way. They can use cartoons or drawings or words which when brought back into the larger group can generate discussion.

**Quilts** are collective or individual visual representations of events, feelings or stories made up from materials, sewing stitches and sometimes patches of cloth. Groups can come together to create a quilt using the time to discuss, analyse and share experiences while being creative and active.

**Poems/songs/stories** can be fun, creative and energising. Encourage everyone to write one of the above, either by her/himself or in groups. These methods can be used for evaluation or for exploring hopes and dreams, or for creative expression.

**Mime/dance/movement** can be introduced to groups in short exercises, such as body sculpture (where members adopt a pose to express a feeling or attitude). Try exercise routines to music. These methods shift the energy within a group and can be useful in breaking down barriers and boundaries that limit the group's cohesion or development.

A number of movement programmes are available where people use music and movement to explore particular features or aspects of themselves. This can be quite specialised and in-depth, or can be taken at a more introductory level as a means of accessing information that can be slower to emerge through talking or other methods.

**Drama and sketches** are powerful tools of learning, change and expression. Within all group settings, drama and sketches can be used to explore and then express any insights or new understandings reached.

Using creative techniques requires a level of skill and knowledge in a facilitator in order to be able to be confident about introducing the method. Nevertheless, this confidence can be developed and most people are able to be open to new approaches, if introduced adequately and appropriately. Symbols, depictions and indicative drawings are all very useful in stimulating conversation and dialogue while allowing for access to the broad range of reactions and responses.

**Observation by group** members entails group members giving feedback on observations. It is often used with other methods such as role play, simulation, and skills practice. Members must be clear that this is not an opportunity to denigrate or criticise. Observers must know what to look for and in the feedback, say what the person did, what they did not do, and discuss their overall impression.

## Spotlight on the facilitator

Explore the following and share your findings with your supervisor:

When planning your next session choose one of the above methods which you have not previously used.

- How effective was it?
- How did you feel about using it?
- Would you use this method again?

## Chapter Twelve



# Exercises: Selection and Samples

### Topics discussed in this chapter:

- Criteria for selecting exercises
- Exercises for different situations
- Spotlight on the facilitator

While some people freeze when a facilitator says, 'let's do a brief energiser exercise', others have no problem and get involved. Between these two reactions lies the key to the advantages and disadvantages of including games and exercises in group work.

Games provide an opportunity to relax, to move from one activity to another, or to get to know co-members in a different way. They can also help break down barriers and produce a common reference point for all members. Some people resist the word game, as they feel it indicates that the exercise is silly/childish and stimulates inhibitions in group members. Throughout this chapter, 'exercise' is used instead to promote the continued use of these techniques and methods to generate involvement, participation, inclusion and achieving the task of the group.

Members may resist the group facilitator because they dislike the exercises, think they are pointless and silly, and are a diversion from the real work. This chapter gives the facilitator concrete pointers on the best ways to introduce and apply exercises.

### Criteria for selecting exercises

When choosing suitable exercises, the facilitator should consider the following issues:

- Is this the group's first meeting with each other or with the facilitator?
- Choose an exercise with which group members will feel comfortable.
- Don't use an exercise unless it has already been tried out on colleagues or friends.
- Make sure the exercise relates clearly to the topic at hand.
- Where appropriate, explain beforehand why a particular exercise is being used. Allow people to opt out if they wish.
- Consider people's abilities to do an exercise (pregnancy, weight, mobility, dexterity, and so on). Do not assume that people cannot do an exercise – some people like to be challenged.
- Develop a wide repertoire of exercises.
- Create some exercises of your own from your experience and knowledge of what is needed.
- If a chosen exercise is not working, abandon it. Non-participation, slow or sluggish involvement, negative comments or an uncomfortable atmosphere are indicators that a game is not working.
- Some exercises are competitive – there will be 'winners' and 'losers'. (If using this type of game, stress the fun and enjoyment of it and underplay the importance of competition. Do this by rewarding the 'losers' in some way.)

### Name exercises – possible options

These exercises are used at the beginning of a session to allow people to learn each other's names and a little about each other. Unless otherwise stated, it is best to form a large circle to run these exercises:

- Everybody sits in a circle. The facilitator selects an object (pen, ball, book, sweet).



She says her name: 'I'm Joan' Then she passes the object to the next person who says: 'I got the pen from Joan and my name is Michael.' Michael passes the pen to the next person and s/he says: 'I got the pen from Michael, who got it from Joan and my name is Betty.' And so on. The last person must remember all the names. With more than fifteen people this might become pressurising and too difficult. Perhaps the facilitator might organise to be the last person and thus, take the pressure.

- Each member chooses a positive adjective which describes her/himself in some way and which starts with the same letter as his/her name, for example Positive Patricia. Positive Patricia introduces herself. The person next to her says: 'This is Positive Patricia, and I'm Marvellous Mary'. And so on around the group.
- Each person takes an animal whose name begins with the same letter as his or her name. First person says: 'I'm Monkey Maurice.' The second person says: 'This is Monkey Maurice, and I'm Penguin Pat.' This continues around the group.
- Ask members to name themselves and give a little information about her/his name. Why was s/he called by that name? After whom is s/he called? Does s/he have a nickname? Does s/he like her/his name or not? Is there any name s/he would like to be called?
- Have a cushion or ball to throw to group members. Everybody says her/his name

once. Then the first person says her/his name plus the name of the person to whom the ball/cushion is being thrown. Continue until people have a good grasp of the names. Check this with the group after two to three minutes. People are not 'out' if they don't get the name of the person they're throwing to. The person fills in her/his correct name and the game continues.

- Stand in a circle. Everybody says her/his name once or twice in a round. One person calls out a name and moves to the place where that person is standing. This second person immediately says another name and moves into that person's space. S/he moves on, calling out a fourth name and so on.

### **'Getting to know people' exercises**

These exercises are used to help group members to get to know each other:

- Write a list of five to ten items on a flipchart (favourite food or tv programme, song, holiday). Ask each person to write down this list. Alternatively, have a handout of the list for each member. Ask them to find three people in the group who can 'sign their autograph' to each item. People have to ask each other whether a particular item applies to them or not. If it applies they can autograph the item, if not they must move on to the next person. Encourage people to move on to another person once they get a signature. The search for signatures through talking to each person in the group is the object of the exercise.

- Make sure there are sufficient crayons, pens, markers and paper for everyone. Ask participants to draw their favourite activity/hobby. Each person describes her/his activity/hobby to the group, explaining what s/he gets from it and how long s/he has been involved. If everyone agrees, the posters can be pinned up around the room.
- Provide blank cards of various sizes, as well as crayons and markers. Ask each person to make a name badge for her/himself, with his/her name and a cartoon or image to express a positive characteristic s/he has. When ready, each says her/his name and describes her/his badge and why s/he chose the colours and symbols used. Get her/him to pin this on for the duration of the session.
- Prepare a handout for each person, listing questions which are to be put to everyone else in the group. If there is a large group (over twelve), have people ask four or five people only. Alternatively, make a list of questions on the flipchart or overhead projector or blackboard. These questions should elicit information from people without being too personal:
  - ‘What tv programme do you hate?’
  - ‘What film do you like best?’
  - ‘What is your favourite food?’
  - ‘Where did you go on your last holiday?’
 Encourage people to identify and express their differences/similarities with other people and to say if anything surprises them.

## Icebreaker exercises

These exercises are used to encourage people to begin talking to each other and to begin the work of the group. They may also be used to re-start a group after a lunch break or if the facilitator senses that the group needs to break from its current activity for a moment.

- Ask each person to tell the group how s/he is feeling at that moment, or since the last time s/he was in the group, or about being in the group.
- Ask each person to think of the colour that would best describe her/his feelings at the moment, and explain why.
- Get participants to describe themselves in terms of a weather forecast and to explain why they would be that type of weather.
- Ask people to relate a positive event they have witnessed or have been part of since the last session. Variations on this could be:
  - ‘Something I’m proud of since . . .’
  - ‘A decision I’ve taken in my life . . .’
- Stand in a circle. When the facilitator calls out a body part, each person must find a partner to touch that body part with her/his own. For example, knees, elbows, heads, shoulders, backs, fingers, and so on. Each member may have an opportunity to call a part so that everyone takes a turn at getting people to touch.

- Move furniture out of the way and get everyone to walk around the room, slowly at first. The facilitator calls 'faster' and members respond. The call goes out again, 'faster', and eventually, the group is running. Slow down the movement by calling out, 'slower'. Eventually, the group is in slow motion. (This is good to warm people up.)
- Work in pairs, one leading and the other mirroring every movement, facial expression, or action of the leader. After a few minutes exchange roles. No talking is allowed but laughter is acceptable.

## Energiser exercises

These exercises can be interspersed throughout a session or used as warm-ups. Ideally, they increase or change energy and focus attention on a topic. They also provide fun and give members a rest from other work.

- **Fruit salad**  
The object is to get a seat for the person who is standing. Everyone sits on a chair in a circle, except the facilitator. S/he then designates participants as either apples or bananas. S/he calls 'apple' and all the apples move. Similarly when s/he calls 'banana', all the bananas move. When she calls 'fruit salad', everyone moves. The person left 'seat-less' calls the fruit the next time to reclaim a seat. If the group is big, take three types of fruit.
- **Cornflakes for breakfast**  
Everyone sits on a chair in a circle, except the facilitator. The facilitator calls out various common features so that people

will move out of their seats, and in the confusion she can sit down in someone's space. For example: 'Anyone who drank tea at breakfast, move', or 'Anyone who is wearing red/blue/green socks, move', or 'Anyone who has curly hair, move.' Whoever is left standing, chooses another feature and tries to get a seat.

- **Musical chairs**

Use a radio or tape machine or create a rhythm by clapping hands or beating a surface. Everybody sits in a row. When the music/rhythm is played, everyone stands up and moves. The music stops and people try to get a seat. In this version only the chair is removed. Eventually all group members have to seat themselves somehow on the remaining chair.

- **Shake out**

The group stands in a circle. The first person stretches/dances/jumps and everyone repeats this movement. (Choose the movement to match the energy you wish to create.) The second person chooses a movement and so on, until everyone has selected a movement and everyone else has repeated it.

- **Chain massage**

Participants are asked to stand one behind another and form a circle, facing the back of the person on their right. They will need to stand close to each other so that they can massage the shoulders and back of the person next to them. Encourage people to relax and to think about the person they are massaging. This can be done in pairs with the couple swapping roles.

- **Word puzzle**

The facilitator says s/he will go on a picnic and bring something with her/him. Participants suggest other items for the picnic and the facilitator says whether they can be brought or not. The determining factor is a rule the facilitator knows but others must work out. It could be that only items that begin with the first letter of the facilitator's name are acceptable or only vegetarian items can be brought or that it is a fruit only picnic. Choose a rule that will be easy enough to figure out.

- **Word magic**

Two people facilitate this exercise: one is a magician, the other a colleague. The colleague exits and participants pick an item in the room which the magician promises the colleague will know when s/he comes in. The colleague returns and the magician lists possible items. The clue for the colleague is that the chosen item is one mentioned immediately after an object with an agreed adjective. For example, if the agreed adjective is 'small' the colleague knows the item chosen by the group is the one following the description of something as 'small'. The group has to decide how the pair work.

- **In the river, on the bank**

Participants stand in a straight line. The facilitator calls two correct instructions: 'In the river' (everybody stays in position) and 'On the bank' (everybody moves forward one step). To confuse things, the facilitator says 'On the river' and 'In the bank'. People who move incorrectly are out. 'Out' people then form a second line with one of them

choosing to call the instructions, or they can begin calling the instructions to those remaining in the original line.

- **Islands**

Clearing a space in the centre of the room, put three or four cushions or sheets of paper on the floor. Give each a name: spring, summer, autumn, winter. These places are designated 'safe islands' to which people can run for to when they hear the instructions. Participants must not leave a foot, heel or toe on the floor as the waters are shark infested. The facilitator calls out options for each of the islands under various headings and people move to the island that represents their choice as quickly as possible. For example: foods, t.v. programmes, types of toothpaste, birthdays, position in the family, holiday destinations. For example: 'All those who like Coronation Street, go to spring island.'

- **Follow the leader**

Everybody, except one person, sits in a circle on chairs. The person without the chair wants to get one and does this by walking around the outside of the circle, making some action or noise. To get the others to leave their seats, s/he taps some or all of them on the shoulder and they follow her, walking outside the circle copying the action or noise the facilitator makes. When the facilitator takes a seat, all the others scramble into the circle to reclaim a chair for themselves. The person without a seat then repeats the walking outside the circle, making a different action or noise.

## Awareness exercises

Techniques and exercises to encourage people to take responsibility for how much they speak within a group are useful.

- Some people are asked to be silent while others are asked to speak.
- An object (ball, pen, stick) is held by the speaker and everyone must listen to the speaker who holds the object. The object must be passed to the person who wishes to speak next. No-one may speak without being in possession of this object.
- Each person is given an agreed number of counters. Members 'spend' their counters whenever they contribute to the discussion. No counters left means no more speaking.

## Listening exercises

- **Introductions**  
The group is divided into pairs. People are asked to work with someone they do not know. One person in each pair introduces her/himself (name, origin, hopes for the group, why they joined the group). They switch roles. The other person now does the same. Back in the larger group, partners introduce each other. The person being introduced can help by adding in any relevant information.
- **Babble-babble**  
Working in pairs, both partners speak simultaneously on a theme given by the facilitator, such as 'everything you've done since getting up this morning.' The pairs

discuss what it was like having to speak simultaneously, and what it was like not to be listened to. Feed back this discussion to the large group. Discuss strategies people use to keep talking and to avoid listening.

- **Make a story**  
Sitting in a circle, a story is made – one sentence at a time. Each person repeats the sentences of those before her/him and adds one more. For a change, get people to say more than one sentence. This exercise is most effective in small groups.
- **Drawing a picture**  
Supply pens and paper to the group. Work in pairs, with one person calling instructions to the other and then switching roles. Alternatively, everyone can draw while the facilitator instructs. The facilitator might say: 'Choose a design, such as a circle, two inches in diameter with a diamond shape in the centre. Place your pen in the centre of the page. Draw a two-inch circle. Directly underneath your original starting point, draw a 45-degree angle line to a point a quarter way around the circle. From here make a similar line to the original starting point', and so on. Discuss the exercise in terms of listening and communicating. See what people come up with and applaud the variations.

## Touch exercises

- **Hands recognition**  
Divide the group into two, A and B. One half, A, stands in a circle facing outwards. The other people, B, remove rings and other identifying jewellery and move around the circle. Group A lets each person

examine and touch hands, with the idea of learning to know each pair of hands. Once group, A, have learned the hands of the people in B, they close their eyes and those in B again give their hands to A for recognition by touch only. If someone correctly names the owner of a pair of hands, the owner identifies her/himself. If this guess is incorrect the other person says nothing. Continue around until all of B have presented their hands to A. Repeat, reversing the positions.

- **Knots**

Standing in a circle, participants move closer to one another. With closed eyes, members reach forward their right hand and catch someone else's hand. Keeping their eyes closed, they then reach forward their left hand and catch another. When everyone opens their eyes they will see themselves in a tightly caught knot. Now, they must untangle themselves to form an unbroken circle of people holding hands, without breaking the circle. This game is useful for team building.

- **Blind walk**

Blindfold everyone (with scarves or pieces of material), except the facilitator. S/he leads the group along a path through the room and gives the person next to her/him instructions on how to move or avoid obstacles. This information is passed along the line. Change the leader. Alternatively, work in pairs with one person blindfolded and the other leading, giving accurate instructions around a set of obstacles. Swap roles.

- **Pass the person**

One group member volunteers to be passed around the group. Stand close together. The volunteer stands in the middle, closes her/his eyes and falls into the arms of whoever is behind her/him. The volunteer is then gently passed around the group from hands to hands. Discuss later the level of trust needed to do this and the difficulties, fears or feelings that arise when it is being done.

- **Fall back**

In pairs, people choose to be the catcher or the faller. The catcher stands behind the faller and holds the faller when s/he allows her/himself to fall back. The faller shuts her/his eyes and signals when s/he is ready to fall. Discuss the trust needed to do this. Focus on fears, inhibitions, or any other feelings people noticed.

## Verbal exercises

- **What I'll need, what I'll give**

Ask each person to say what s/he needs from members so that s/he will work well. Participants then say what they will give to the group to enable people to work well together. If possible, record these statements and encourage members to act on them throughout the session.

- **Life stories**

People can be encouraged to tell a story about their lives using one of the following formats. These exercises can take quite a long time, so allow sufficient time for everybody to share her/his story:

- *Lifelines*. Each person draws a line representing her/his life on a large sheet of paper, marking in various important events. The facilitator could also ask participants to recall specific events. Each person then shares her/his lifeline with the full group.
- *Tree of life*. Participants draw a tree on a large sheet of paper. The roots represent family of origin, where they were reared, and some family details. The trunk represents their current lives – people, work, hobbies. The branches represent their supports, the leaves are for successes and achievements and the buds are for future hopes. Participants spend time drawing their tree and filling in the appropriate details. Drawings are shared later in the full group.
- *Past, present, future*. Participants draw aspects of their past, present and future (symbols, cartoons, colours, whatever visual representation feels right). When everyone is ready, each participant shares the drawings with the whole group.
- *One thing about me*. Participants write down one thing about themselves that no one else in the group knows. All pieces of paper are placed in a container in the centre of the group. One by one, each person picks a piece of paper, reads it out and the group together try to decide together to whom it refers. Once a person is named, the true referent identifies her/himself.

- **Web**

Sitting in a circle, the facilitator holds a ball of wool with the open end wrapped around a finger. S/he says something

positive about herself and then throws the wool to another member, saying something positive about that person. The second person wraps the wool around a finger, says something about her/himself, throws the wool to another person and says something about that person. Continue around the group until everyone has had a turn. To unravel the web the last speaker throws the wool back to the person who threw it to her, repeating the positive statements this person made about her. And so on back to the facilitator.

- **Appreciations**

Sit in a circle. Ask each member to give an expression of appreciation to the person on her/his right. Name the starting place and continue around until everyone has received an appreciation from the person next to her/him.

- **Honest sentence completion cards**

Make a set of cards with a sentence on each one. For example:

‘When I am older I will . . .’

‘My favourite music is . . .’

‘I’m good at . . .’

‘I’d like to . . .’

Ensure that the sentences take the needs and level of experience of the group into account. Place all the cards face down in the centre of the circle. Each person picks a card and completes the sentence as honestly as possible.



## Co-operation exercises

These games can promote discussion on how well the group works together, what communication is like, who listened to whom, who tries to lead, the feelings people have during the exercise, and how a group feels towards a facilitator. Achieving a task, no matter how small, builds trust and communication within a group and permits discussion on trust and communication levels in the group.

- **Thirty-inch circle**

Draw a big circle (about 30 inches) on the floor. The group must devise ways for everyone to stand inside it (suitable for groups of up to twelve or fourteen).

- **Tower building**

Give the group a sheet of A4 paper, a pair of scissors, a ruler, a pencil, a cassette and two 1-inch-long pieces of cello tape. The group must build a 12-inch paper column on which the cassette can be balanced for one minute.

- **Broken squares**

Distribute various pieces of card which actually make up five identical squares. Ask members to make five squares as a group without talking. They can share the pieces of card but cannot take pieces held by others.

## Closing exercises

These are used to bring a session to a close, to acknowledge what has been achieved and to enable the group to say goodbye on a positive note.

- **Rounds of appreciation**

Participants receive positive feedback on their contribution to the group process from group members. These appreciations may be written in a notebook or written on a sheet of paper for each member, or they may be spoken in a group circle.

- **Unwrapping a present**

Buy sweets (at least three per person) and around each sweet wrap a message. Place all sweets in the centre and ask someone to begin. The person unwraps the sweet, reads the message and gives the sweet to the person the message most applies to. The receiver then picks another sweet and gives it to the person s/he feels fits the message on that sweet. Keep going until all sweets are gone.

- **Group affirmation**

Engage the group members in making up a song/poem/sketch/dance. Use a popular tune. The dance or poem should express what has happened for them in the group. They then perform for each other.

- **Advertisements**

In small groups (or the entire group, depending on size), draw up an advertisement to encourage others to do the course, join the group, or take part in the programme. This could be a newspaper, radio or tv commercial which

should highlight the benefits of being in the group. It can be hung up in the workroom or acted out.

- **I'm taking with me**

Participants state one thing that they are taking with them from the group. This could be a friendship, a new skill, or an insight.

- **General comment**

On big sheets of paper, write open-ended sentences such as:

'What I gained from this group is . . .'

'What I most enjoyed in this group is . . .'

'What I would change in this group is . . .'

There will be one sentence per sheet.

Members move around the sheets and finish the sentences.

## Group hope exercises

- **Wish for the group, wish for myself**

Standing in a circle with arms around each other, everybody in the group expresses a wish for her/himself and a wish for the group.

- **Group hug**

Standing in a circle, arms around each other, members hug the group.

Alternatively, the group breaks the circle to fold in on itself like a swissroll. Then in this tight circle they hug each other. This exercise will be more appropriate for some groups than others, depending on their experiences together and the work they have completed.

- **Reflections**

In turn, each group member says what the group has meant to her/him.

- **Leaving the group**

Stand in a circle with eyes closed and focus on the words of the facilitator. The facilitator takes members back through the life of the group, highlighting special events or stages. When s/he reaches the present, members are asked to focus on their feelings, now that the closing moment has come. The facilitator moves to the future and asks how the group experience will influence their lives in the days and weeks ahead. S/he asks the group to turn around slowly and face outwards. They are asked to leave behind anything that belongs only to the group when they feel ready to walk away from the group towards the rest of their evening or day.

## Spotlight on the facilitator

Examine your response to certain exercises and share your findings with your supervisor.

- Which are your favourites?
- Why?
- Which do you dislike using?
- Why?

(These exercises are variations of a widely available number of games.)

## Chapter Thirteen

# Skills Enhancement Programme Record

These sheets can be used to record your personal skills enhancement programme, your identified areas for improvement and your progress on these. You could also copy these pages and use them to refresh your skills on a regular basis.

**Who might you choose to work with you to support your development?** .....

.....

.....

.....

**What skills, experience and qualities do you want them to have?**.....

.....

.....

.....

**Agreed timeframe with the identified person:** .....

Number of sessions: .....

Frequency of sessions: .....

Duration of session: .....

**Action plan for your development:**

(Use the *Spotlight on the facilitator* sections throughout the book to identify which skills you particularly want to improve and develop.)

Skills: .....

.....

.....

Group settings – membership of the groups:.....

.....

.....

Experiences of different types of session to facilitate:.....

.....

.....

Where might you find opportunities to practise your skills? .....

.....

.....

**Review your progress on each session:**

What did you do well?.....  
.....  
.....

What would you change?.....  
.....  
.....

Why do you think facilitation is a useful tool for your work? .....  
.....  
.....

What values and principles underpin your work? .....  
.....  
.....

What do you see as the role of a facilitator? .....  
.....  
.....

How can a facilitator contribute to greater equality? .....  
.....  
.....

When do you think you should stop working with a particular group? .....  
.....  
.....

What are the situations that you find difficult to stay in? Why? .....  
.....  
.....

How can your work be improved? .....  
.....  
.....

What steps can you take to undergo these improvements?.....  
.....  
.....

What are the challenges to you?.....  
.....  
.....

What improvements do you notice in your work?.....  
.....  
.....

Feedback from the group? .....

**Reflections on the experience:**

**Comments and material that emerged during the supervision session:**

**Next targets:**

## Chapter Fourteen

# Useful Reading and Contacts

The following books and resource packs are all useful for different types of situations where you might use your facilitation and group work skills. Many of the issues raised in the books are relevant to all situations, even if one particular group is being described.

### Useful reading/written materials – general group work and facilitation skills books:

AONTAS, 1991. Women's Education Group. *From the Personal to the Political*. Attic Press, Dublin.

Algar, Jill, 1990. *Better Meetings*. Open University, Milton Keynes.

Barr, Alan et al., 1998. *Community Development Evaluation Skills*. Scottish Community Development Centre. Glasgow.

Benson, Jarlath, 1987. *Working More Creatively with Groups*. Tavistock Publications, London.

Brandes, Donna & Phillips, Howard, 1984. *Gamester's Handbook* No. 1 & 2. Hutchinson, London.

Butler, Sandra & Wintra, Claire, 1991. *Feminist Group Work*. Sage Publications, (Gender and Psychology Series), London.

Clarke, Jane, 1996. *Guide to self Evaluation*. Combat Poverty Agency. Dublin.

Houston, Graham, 1993. *Teambuilding. The Industrial Society*. London.

Hope, Anne & Timmel, Sue, 2000 second edition. *Training for transformation. A Handbook for Community Workers* (Vols 1-3). Mambo Press, Gweru.

Johnson, David and Johnson, Frank. sixth edition. *Joining Together. Group Theory and Group Skills*. London.

Kemp, Tim & Taylor Alan, 1990. *The Groupwork Pack. A Groupwork Approach to Problem-Solving and Change*. Longman, Harlow.

Kretzmann, John and McKnight John. 1993. *Building Communities from the Inside Out. A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing A Community's Assets*. The Asset Based Community Development Institute. Evanston. Illinois.

Murray, Barbara, Faughnan, Pauline and Redmond, David, 1994. *Undertaking an Evaluation*. Sociological Association of Ireland, Maynooth.

Whyld, Janie, 1992. *Equal Opportunities in Group Work and Training*. Whyld Publishing Co-Op, UK.

### Resource packs for specific themes:

Browne, Jacqui, & Browne, Sharon & Fitzgerald, Helen with O' Duffy, Molly, 2000. *Quick Guide to Handouts of Progress Through Learning Course and Making Progress Together*. People with Disabilities Ireland, Dublin.

Caherty, Therese, 1994. *Making Connections. Women Developing Links for Change*. Banúlacht Handbook for Community Trainers. Banúlacht, Dublin.

One Family, 1999. *Moving On. A Resource Manual for Working with Single Parents*. One Family, Cherish House Dublin.

Combat Poverty Agency, 2001. *An Anti-Poverty Training Resource for Local Government*. Combat Poverty Agency, Dublin.

Community Women's Education Initiatives, 1998. *Truslog na mBan. Personal and Social Awareness*. A Training Manual for Working Class Women. Cork.

Coughlan, Susan, 1995. *Far Out! The Why, What and How of Outdoor Education*. NYCI, Dublin.

Gallagher, Fiona, 2000. *Steps to Effective Participation at Local Level*. Clondalkin Women's Network Ltd., Dublin

Jenkins Jon C & Jenkins Maureen R, 1997. *The Social Process Triangles*. Groningen, The Netherlands.

LOT, 1999. *Lesbian Information and Resource Pack. A Learning and Development Tool Towards Inclusion*. LOT, Dublin.

Healy, Grainne, 1994. *Mothers and Breadwinners*. Parents Alone Resource Centre, Dublin.

Women's Aid, 1999. *Violence Against Women in Intimate Relationships*. Women's Aid, Dublin.

Taylor, Maeve, 2004. *Economic Literacy. A Facilitator's Guide to Facilitating Economic Literacy*. Banúlacht. Dublin.

National Youth Council of Ireland, 2004. *Sugar and Spice A Resource Book for Working with Young Women*. second edition. NYCI. Dublin.

### **Contacts for facilitation, training and development:**

Meitheal Development Ltd  
35 Exchequer Street, Dublin 2  
Tel: (01) 6719803  
info@meitheal.ie

Adult and Community Education Department  
National University of Ireland  
Maynooth, Co, Kildare  
Tel: (01) 708 3757  
Fax: (01) 708 4687  
Email: adcomed.centre@may.ie  
www.may.ie/academic

CAFE (Creative Activity for Everyone)  
10/11 South Earl Street, Dublin 8  
Tel: (01) 4736600  
Fax: (01) 4736599  
Email: cafe@connect.ie

Combat Poverty Agency  
Bridgewater Centre,  
Conyngham Road,  
Islandbridge, Dublin 8  
Tel: (01) 6706746  
Fax: (01) 6706760  
Email: info@cpa.ie  
www.combatpoverty.ie



Community Action Network  
24 Gardiner Place, Dublin 1  
Tel: (01) 8788005  
canadmin@eircom.net

Comhairle  
7th Floor, Hume House, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4  
Tel: (01) 605 9000  
Fax: (01) 605 9099  
Email: comhairle@comhairle.ie  
website: www.comhairle.ie

Framework  
Unit 1, Village Business Centre,  
Upper Patrick Street, Kilkenny  
Tel: 056 64328  
Email: frameworkpj@iol.ie

Holywell Trust  
10-12 Bishop Street,  
Derry  
BT48 6PW, Northern Ireland  
Tel: ++ 7126 1941  
Fax: ++ 7126 9332  
Email: holywell.trust@business.ntl.com

Irish National Organisation for the  
Unemployed  
Araby House,  
8 North Richmond Street,  
Dublin 1  
Tel: (01) 8560088  
Fax 01 8560098  
Email: inou@iol.ie  
www.inou.ie/

Partners  
24 Northbrook Square,  
Dublin 6

Triskele  
1A Parnell Street,  
Carrickmacross,  
Co. Monaghan  
Tel: (042) 966706

### **Resource Centres and Libraries:**

Carmichael Centre for Voluntary  
Organisations  
North Brunswick Street,  
Dublin 7  
Tel: (01) 8735702  
Fax: (01) 8735737  
website: www.carmichaelcentre.ie/

Combat Poverty Agency  
Bridgewater Centre,  
Conyngham Road,  
Islandbridge, Dublin 8  
Tel: (01) 6706746  
Fax: (01) 6706760  
Email: info@cpa.ie  
website: www.combatpoverty.ie

Community Workers Co-operative  
First Floor, Unit 4,  
Tuam Road Centre,  
Galway  
Tel: (091) 779 030  
Fax: (091) 779 033  
Email: info@cwcc.ie  
website: www.cwcc.ie

Irish Family Planning Association  
Solomons House,  
42A Pearse Street,  
Dublin 2  
Tel: (01) 474 0944  
Fax: (01) 474 0945  
Email [post@ifpa.ie](mailto:post@ifpa.ie)  
website: [www.ifpa.ie](http://www.ifpa.ie)

Irish National Organisation for the  
Unemployed  
Araby House,  
8 North Richmond Street,  
Dublin 1  
Tel: (01) 8560088  
Fax 01 8560098  
Email: [inou@iol.ie](mailto:inou@iol.ie)  
website: [www.inou.ie/](http://www.inou.ie/)

National Youth Federation  
20 Dominic Street, Dublin 1  
Tel: (01) 8729933  
Fax: (01) 8724183  
Email: [info@nyi.ie](mailto:info@nyi.ie)  
website: [www.nyf.ie](http://www.nyf.ie)

Women's Education Research and Resource  
Centre  
University College Dublin,  
Belfield, Dublin 4

**Organisations that provide facilitation skills training:**

Meitheal Developments Ltd.  
35, Exchequer Street,  
Dublin 2.  
Tel: (01) 6719803  
Fax: (01) 6719573  
Email: [info@meitheal.ie](mailto:info@meitheal.ie)

Triskele  
1a Parnell Street,  
Carrickmacross, Co Monaghan  
Tel: (042) 9663706  
Fax: (042) 9663707  
Email: [triskctd@iol.ie](mailto:triskctd@iol.ie)

LDTI (Local Development Training Institute)  
Summer School operating in UCD, Dublin.  
LDTI

81 Upper Georges Street,  
Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin  
Tel: (01) 2300640  
Email: [info@ldti.ie](mailto:info@ldti.ie)  
website: [www.ldti.ie](http://www.ldti.ie)

Some individual trainers undertake facilitation and group work training.

FETAC module developed by Meitheal and available from:

FETAC  
East Point Business Plaza,  
East Point Business Park,  
Dublin 3.  
Tel: (01) 8659500  
Fax: (01) 8650067  
Email: [information@fetac.ie](mailto:information@fetac.ie)  
website: [www.fetac.ie](http://www.fetac.ie)

# Glossary



**Facilitation:** A way of working with people, facilitation enables and empowers people to participate, discuss, decide, carry out a task or perform an action.

**Group dynamics:** All groups have a dynamic – a way in which the individuals in the group interact and form a pattern of interaction. The study of these patterns, in a group setting, is called ‘group dynamics’.

**Projection:** Persons recognise and identify a feature in someone else which they deny having themselves.

**Task:** The action or desired end/goal of a group, the ‘what’ of a group.

**Process:** The way in which a group moves towards its goal – the ‘how’ of things.

**Peer:** The facilitator’s peer, that is friends, neighbours, colleagues of the facilitator.

**Maintaining:** Being aware of the individuals in a group and of how the group is all together, so as to provide support for individuals to ensure their well-being and comfort in the group.

**Brainstorm:** A quick listing of first thoughts and reactions to an idea.

**Opening round:** The introductory part of any session when each person in a group gets a chance to participate actively in some way.

**Closing round:** The final part of any session when each person in a group gets a chance to participate actively in some way.

**Check-in:** When the facilitator makes a point of finding out how everyone in the group is feeling.

**Confronting:** Bringing out into the open and naming underlying or hidden conflicts.

**Boundaries:** A boundary is ‘an invisible line’ drawn around a person when working with groups. Everyone within a group has boundaries between themselves and the others. This line demarcates the extent of the person’s involvement. It can also indicate to the group what it can expect in terms of personal disclosure, social involvement and work limits on the part of the facilitator in particular.

**Evaluation:** An opportunity to examine the progress of both task and process of any group.

**Energisers:** Short activities which help to raise the flagging energy levels of any group.

**Icebreakers:** Short participatory exercises which help group members to get know each other and to get involved actively in the group process.

**Active listening:** More than simply listening to someone, it is absorbing what is being said and letting the speaker know that s/he has been heard. It is about ensuring that the speaker feels ‘listened to’.

**Norms or standards:** Commonly accepted behaviour, attitudes, beliefs and values existing within a group.

**Roles:** How we interact with the group in general and with individuals in particular.

**Simulation:** Use of situations, real or imaginary, to practise skills, demonstrate a technique or show an interaction.

**Group contract:** An agreement made by all members of a group; names the types of behaviours and expectations of each other which are acceptable for that particular group.

It usually includes issues such as respect, confidentiality/listening and timekeeping. Group contracts help to maintain safety for group members. They usually require refinement after an initial period of time working together.

**Stuck:** A term used to refer to a situation in a group where the process or the task is literally unable to be moved in any direction. People can be 'stuck' in positions, in an emotion, in a reaction. A facilitator in this situation needs to find a technique or exercise that will help people move out of the 'stuckness'.

*Developing Facilitation Skills - A Handbook for Group Facilitators* is aimed at people who are already working with groups, who have some experience of facilitating and who wish to develop their skills in this area of work. The handbook outlines the theory of facilitation and its links with group development. It provides the reader with a practical programme of skills development and advises on creating realistic goals in relation to particular areas of group development, outlining throughout how self-reflection and self-analysis are key to this process.

The book is designed to be used over a period of time by the reader who is a trainee facilitator and keen to learn more. Developing facilitation skills comes with practice, self-awareness and an openness to challenging ways of operating. The questions and exercises in this publication will act as a guide on this journey.