

Meetings Worksheet

Purposeful meetings are a key part of our working, planning and making good stuff happen. Meeting patterns need to meet the team's needs to connect and catch up with each other, attend to what's arising, make decisions and plan action.

Facilitating a workshop

Facilitating a meeting or workshop is like putting on a show in which you're the ringleader or MC and everyone else is an actor but also part of the audience. Your job is to make the workshop engaging (your audience is alert and following every turn of the show as it unfolds,) give everyone an opportunity to contribute or do their bit (there's no show more dull than one where you can't relate to it) and arrive at the end satisfied that their time has been well spent.

There are some simple tools that can help make a workshop engaging, interactive and the best possible use of everyone's time:

Purpose

What are we here for? What's the best possible story that could unfold here?

The purpose of the workshop is the heart of your design. Establish what is needed from the workshop. Where do you need to be by the end? Ensure your purpose is clear, short (less than 10 words) and compelling or inspiring. Use it to guide the design of the workshop and state it clearly right at the beginning (it should be one of your first three sentences) at the workshop.

Improvise - Say yes!

Your workshop is an improvisation guided by your purpose with all of your participants as co-creators. Make it fun and an adventure. You don't know what's going to happen, no one does. Use your purpose as your compass and guide to how to steer the group.

One of the most effective tools of improvisation is to say 'yes'. Not 'yes', YES! Whatever happens welcome it, thank the giver and either use it, transform it or park it. Just like in a martial art, welcome and accept the input and then transform it and use it to build towards our purpose.

If someone has an idea for progressing the conversation, use it. If someone comes late, welcome them. If someone dominates the conversation, thank them for their ideas and suggest that we now hear from others. If someone has a question you can't answer, thank them, write it up on a flipchart and say you'll come back to them.

Rank / Status

Differences in power and status are always present, they drive a story and they can play out in your workshop in useful and less helpful ways. Your show will need everyone's participation and engagement if it's to be successful and you need to both use your own rank in the most helpful ways and to help others to do that too. There are three sources of rank:

Positional rank

Comes from formal position in a hierarchy

Social rank

Comes from race, gender, age, religion, education, nationality, appearance,

Personal rank

Comes from self-esteem, inner strength or resilience, influencing skills

Pay attention to what issues of rank are present. Are there people with line management relationships, differences of culture or age? Use your positional rank as facilitator to give you the authority to steer the group and to encourage the involvement of those with less rank in this context. Practices that will increase your own power in a workshop are standing up when you talk, breathing or centering practices you can do before the start, dressing up a bit, preparation and confidence in the subject matter. Sometimes it's useful to lower your rank which you can do by sitting down, speaking less, making jokes and asking questions.

Trust the Group

Your workshop is a unique constellation of people that probably won't ever come together in exactly this way again. For this time you are a community convening to achieve the purpose you have gathered around. The wisdom and the answers are in the group and shared among you and between you.

Similarly, if anyone behaves in an unhelpful way, the group will usually balance and moderate it. You will sometimes need to be prepared to challenge and question and stand your ground but the group will also challenge and balance behaviours.