Kavana Tree Bressen ✶ Facilitation & Workshops

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SHORT FACILITATION SCENARIOS

Instructions

The following are designed as "quick response" facilitation challenges. The way i do it is to get the group into small groups of 3-4 people, so you'll want to print sufficient packets for each group to have one. The packets are designed to be printed out and then cut into half sheets, then compiled with a paper clip.

Give each group a full packet. Designate one person to start (i usually do this through something like "Find out who in your group has a birthday latest in the year"). Then have the person on their right read them one of the slips. The person whose turn it is then says what they would actually say (or do) in that moment as facilitator. They don't talk *about* what they would say, instead they say it *as if they were actually at the meeting*. The listeners can offer a bit of feedback if there's time and the person seems open to it, but be careful that you don't end up spending most of your time in analysis instead of in practice —actual practice is generally more useful and fulfilling. For the next turn, the slips move to the left, so that the person who just facilitated becomes the next reader.

I wrote the scenarios below. Feel free to write more, and if you do, i'd love to see 'em!

During the time at the meeting set aside for announcements, Quinn starts going on about something they are concerned about but which is not appropriate for going into detail on at this time. They want to add time into the meeting agenda for it, and your sense is that others are not likely to support this.

[How do you respond?]

[a]

Two people attending the meeting, Jesse and Kim, have a history of not getting along well. Jesse is presenting a proposal at this meeting. During clarifying questions, Kim puts out a question with a sharp tone, one that clearly has an edge to it. Jesse answers the question, you think with some discomfort.

[What's your response?]

[b]

A complex proposal has been working its way through multiple meetings and finally seems ready to pass. Then someone who skipped those meetings shows up at the last meeting and brings up a bunch of concerns (e.g., the cost seems too high, the group historically has had weak follow-through on things like this, and so on).

[What do you say the moment they are finished speaking?]

[c]

In the middle of a somewhat difficult meeting—where the group is running over time on an agenda item that seems close to resolution, but it hasn't come to agreement yet and time is passing—someone speaks about how frustrated they are by the process, and "couldn't this whole thing just get wrapped up already?"

[How do you respond?]

[d]

One member, Harper, tends to have a dominant role in group discussions. They have a lot of expertise to offer, yet are not always sensitive to social and emotional dynamics. At this meeting, Harper has just made a proposal to the group that people are having significant resistance to, and your sense is that Harper is trying to push it through. Sam brings up a concern, and Harper responds, "Well i really don't think that's anything we have to worry about."

[What do you say next?]

[e]

The governance committee has just presented their plan for how decision-making will be handled from now on. The committee did a lot of research and gathered a lot of input before making the proposal, so it was quite solid and most members at the meeting seem pleased with it. Dusty, however, starts bringing up a bunch of nitpicky concerns, and you can see the energy getting lower in the meeting as Dusty goes into more and more detail.

[How do you respond?]

[f]

Nadia presents a proposal that isn't well-researched enough. Pat responds with a comment about her lack of preparation that is funny and sarcastic—on target but perhaps a little hurtful.

[How do you respond?]

[g]

You are facilitating the outreach team meeting, which is discussing its plan for the next 6 months. Leslie and Angel, who both serve on the team, have a long-standing conflict regarding whether to focus on meetings and in-person outreach vs. using social media and online engagement. You see the conflict starting to heat up between them.

[What do you say?]

[h]

You are doing your best to facilitate a difficult issue. You make a suggestion on how to proceed, then one of the participants turns on you in frustration, accusing you of letting your own bias affect the process and of trying to control the group too much.

[What's your response?]

[i]

The organization has several times committed to working on its vision and mission statements, and somehow it keeps not happening. The topic was scheduled for tonight's meeting, but then during agenda review (at the start of the meeting) it comes out that the committee that was supposed to present didn't meet, so the facilitator proposes putting the topic off again. Kasey, whose frustration at the group not working on this has been mounting for a long time, says "I'm not willing to consent to anything else until we get this done."

[What do you say?]

[j]

The group has a member named Laura who many others find difficult to work with, because she has a negative attitude, a thin skin, and often blows up at people. The meeting is discussing the topic of who serves on what committees, and Laura is not present at the meeting. Kelsey declines to serve on the finance team with Laura, and starts telling the story of a difficult encounter they had. Jan interrupts and says, "I'm really uncomfortable with Laura being talked about behind her back."

[Next?]

[k]

The meeting is discussing finance issues. There's a shortfall in this year's budget, and two camps on how to respond. Some people think membership dues should be raised, while others think the group should focus on other options. Someone from the first side has just said, "Come on people, i think we need to step up and take responsibility, let's grow up here!"

[What do you say?]

[l]

Your group has one member known for having emotional outbursts at meetings, to the point where some people consider Taylor to be borderline mentally unstable. A normal discussion is taking place regarding the conflict resolution policy when suddenly Taylor interrupts the person speaking, and starts going off about the topic at high volume and high tempo, clearly quite agitated.

[What's your immediate response?]

[m]

One of the older members of the group, Charles, is rambling on in the meeting. It's not the first time he's done this, and while he's always tended to be talkative, recently some participants have privately started to suspect that he has Alzheimer's. You try giving him a few cues to wrap up, but he continues speaking. Finally you know that you have to step in more directly.

[What do you say or do?]

[n]