DDD

D-Cards
Difficulties
Decisions
Deliberations

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A series of cards designed to support effective conversations in diverse groups. Created in partnership between IRISS and Providers and Personalisation (CCPS).

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www.iriss.org.uk
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Links and references

Online links:

Kinharvie Institute
www.kinharvie.org.uk

Beyond the Edge
www.vivmcwaters.com.au

Facilitating With Confidence
www.facilitatingwithconfidence.com

PechaKucha Presentation Style
www.pecha-kucha.org

Thiagi – lots of free activities
www.thiagi.com

References

Bens I (2005) *Facilitating with Ease! Core Skills for Facilitators, Team Leaders and Members, Managers, Consultants, and Trainers*, California: Jossey-Bass

Dewar, Belinda (2011) *Caring about caring: an appreciative inquiry about compassionate relationship centred care.* PhD thesis, Edinburgh Napier University. http://researchrepository.napier.ac.uk/4845/

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Wiseman R (2009) *59 Seconds: think a little, change a lot,* London: Pan Macmillan

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Introduction

Creating spaces for dialogue between people from a variety of organisations and backgrounds is not an easy task. It requires time, resources and commitment. It also calls for participants to be flexible and honest about their relationships, as well as being open to experiencing alternative ways of relating to each other. This diversity can breed innovation, energy, consensus and understanding of a broader context, but it can also lead to inaction and frustration.

These cards have been developed to give you practical help in facilitating diverse groups. This is not a 'how to' guide, but a tool to help you explore new approaches and develop your own.

The content of the cards has been developed through trial and error from a range of different projects facilitated by IRISS and Providers and Personalisation (CCPS). We would like to acknowledge every facilitator that we've worked with for their valuable influence, suggestions and observations.

How the pack works

Cards are separated into **THINK** and **ACTIVITY** cards.

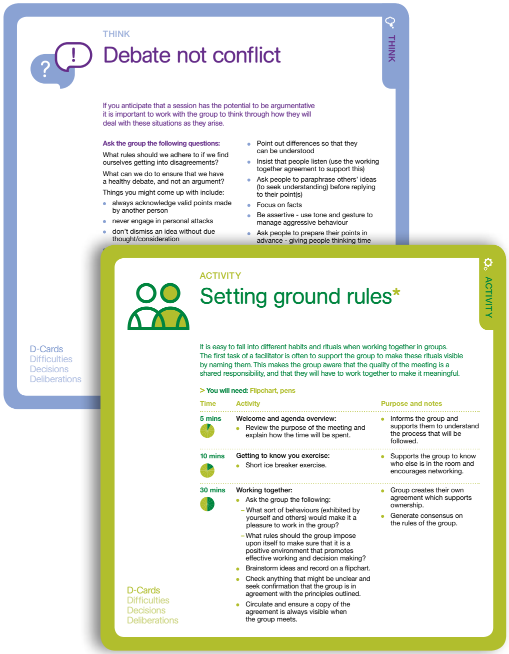
- **THINK** cards are for planning and preparing - a key part of facilitating difficult discussions
- **ACTIVITY** cards are methods and approaches - practical things to do with groups

On the front:

- What is this for?
  Purpose of the activity
- What do I do?
  Explanation of the activity

On the back:

- What we thought worked
  (and didn't!) about the activity


THINK

Debate not conflict

If you anticipate that a session has the potential to be argumentative it is important to work with the group to think through how they will deal with these situations as they arise.

Ask the group the following questions:

What rules should we adhere to if we find ourselves getting into disagreements?

What can we do to ensure that we have a healthy debate, and not an argument?

Things you might come up with include:

- always acknowledge valid points made by another person
- never engage in personal attacks
- don't dismiss an idea without due thought/consideration
- Point out differences so that they can be understood
- Insist that people listen (use the working together agreement to support this)
- Ask people to paraphrase others' ideas (to seek understanding) before replying to their point(s)
- Focus on facts
- Be assertive - use tone and gesture to manage aggressive behaviour
- Ask people to prepare their points in advance - giving people thinking time

ACTIVITY

Setting ground rules*

It is easy to fall into different habits and rituals when working together in groups. The first task of a facilitator is often to support the group to make these rituals visible by naming them. This makes the group aware that the quality of the meeting is a shared responsibility, and that they will have to work together to make it meaningful.

> You will need: Flipchart, pens

Time	Activity	Purpose and notes
5 mins	**Welcome and agenda overview:** • Review the purpose of the meeting and explain how the time will be spent.	• Informs the group and supports them to understand the process that will be followed.
10 mins	**Getting to know you exercise:** • Short ice breaker exercise.	• Supports the group to know who else is in the room and encourages networking.
30 mins	**Working together:** • Ask the group the following: – What sort of behaviours (exhibited by yourself and others) would make it a pleasure to work in the group? – What rules should the group impose upon itself to make sure that it is a positive environment that promotes effective working and decision making? • Brainstorm ideas and record on a flipchart. • Check anything that might be unclear and seek confirmation that the group is in agreement with the principles outlined. • Circulate and ensure a copy of the agreement is always visible when the group meets.	• Group creates their own agreement which supports ownership. • Generate consensus on the rules of the group.

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The 7 C's

We think the 7 C's of appreciative conversations offer useful underpinning principles when facilitating diverse groups. Dewar (2011) highlights that these conversations require people to:

1 **Be courageous**
What matters? What would happen if you gave this a go? What is the worst that could happen if you did this?

2 **Connect emotionally**
How did this make you feel? I feel... it made a difference because....

3 **Be curious**
What strikes you about this? Help me to understand what is happening here? What prompted you to act in that way? What stopped you acting in the way you wanted?

4 **Collaborate**
How can we work together to make this happen? What do you need to help you to make this happen? How would you like to be involved? How would you like me to be involved? What would the desired goal look like for you?

5 **Consider other perspectives**
Help me to understand where you're coming from. What do others think? What do you expect to happen? What is real and what is possible?

6 **Compromise**
What is important to you? What would you like to happen? How can we work together to make this happen? What do you feel you can do to help us to get there?

7 **Celebrate**
What worked well here? Why did it work well? How can we help this to happen more of the time? What are our strengths in being able to achieve this? What is currently happening that we can draw on?

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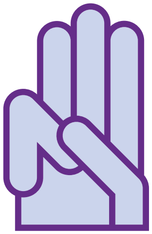

THINK

Be prepared!

Getting to know the people you'll be working with is an essential step in designing any effective meeting.

We find surveys are a useful way to gather this information.

Surveys should include:

- Questions that enable you to get a better understanding of the topic/issue at hand eg 'What would you like us to achieve...?', 'How will we know we've been successful...?' 'How does [the topic] relate to your work...?'
- Questions that enable you to determine attitudes/perceptions of the different stakeholders eg 'What is most important to you about...?', 'What is the biggest challenge facing the group...?'
- Questions which support your understanding of previous interactions between the participants. eg 'What are your concerns/worries about working with...?', 'Tell us about a time when you worked in partnership well. What helped...?'
- Questions that help you plan your sessions. eg 'What should our main priority be...?', 'What is your preference for the format of meetings...?'

To help participants prepare for the session (or series of sessions), a method we've used is to send a comprehensive letter with enough detail to allow people to understand the nature of the group, and your expectations of their involvement.

Letters should include:

- The topic to be discussed
- Benefits of being involved in the piece of work
- The range of people who have been invited to take part in the group
- Commitment required (number of days, frequency of meetings, length of meetings)
- Expectations and roles.

THINK

Be prepared!

THINK

Surveys

Surveys need to be anonymous to allow people to feel comfortable in being honest and open - particularly in instances where you are asking about previous relationships. That said, it is also important to say why you are asking questions and what you will do with the information to allay any fears. Surveys can help you to set the right tone for the group going forward - ie that as a facilitator you are seeking understanding and that you will be responsive to their needs.

Letters

In our experience, issuing people with a letter helped them understand why they should attend the group, which made them better prepared for the work. It also gave an opportunity to tell them why they (in particular) were invited, reducing the likelihood of them asking others to substitute for them. Sending the letter in advance meant that people had the opportunity to reflect on what was being asked, seek clarification (where necessary), and seek input from other colleagues (where appropriate).

Other methods to consider:

- Meet people face to face individually
- Conduct a group interview/focus group
- Go along and observe the group.

Note: the more resistant a group is likely to be, the more necessary to hold interviews beforehand - so you can be aware of any blocks.

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ACTIVITY

Breaking the ice

Offers and Wants.

By inviting people to share something beyond their official position, you hint at the human dimension of every member. This can often be a useful first step to overcome stereotypes - particularly in groups that include participants from two opposed sides, or where there is an obvious power imbalance (Escobar, 2011).

> You will need: Personal profiles, card, pens, lots of space

Time	Activity	Purpose and notes
30 mins	**Personal profiles (15 mins)** • Hand out profile forms. These should include contact details, and three skills/ areas of expertise that the person has • In pairs, interview the person next to you and write the responses on the profile form • Pass the form back to the individual. **Wants (15 mins)** Ask participants to think about three things they want to know, or things that they'd like to do (challenges) Ask them to write these down - one on each card, as well as their name and email address on the back of each card.	• Get to know each other • Articulate the challenges that you are currently facing at work/in the project.
30 mins	**Get mixing! Ask group participants to circulate and find someone who can help them with their want. Examples of what this might include:** • Examples of innovative practice in the workplace • Support for the implementation of a pilot project on early intervention • A contact who is delivering self-directed support in rural areas.	• Find out who could support you with some of the challenges that you currently face.

ACTIVITY

ACTIVITY

Breaking the ice

Pass the envelope

When you are nervous in a group, it is often easier to talk about someone else's idea, rather than your own. Also, quieter members of the group often need time to think/reflect before speaking out, and so this method should support these people to contribute better (Bens, 2005).

> **You will need:** Chairs arranged in a circle, envelopes, blank paper and pens

Time	Activity	Purpose and notes
35 mins	**The activity (5 mins)** Give each person an envelope filled with blank paper. Pose a question or challenge to the group and have everyone write down as many ideas as they can within the given time frame. Tell people to pass the envelopes out in all directions. After 20 seconds, stop the passing, and ask them to read the contents of the envelopes they received. **Discussion in pairs: (10 mins)** 1. What ideas did they receive? 2. What are the positives and negatives of each idea? (one of each) 3. What other ideas should they add? **Discussion in larger group: (20 mins)** 1. Discuss each idea 2. Refine each of the ideas 3. Pick two ideas to report back to the group.	• Get to know each other • Make people feel comfortable about giving feedback • The focus of this does not need to be generating ideas. You can change the topic to include goal setting or trouble shooting.

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ACTIVITY

Breaking the ice

Just a minute

Based on the popular BBC Radio 4 programme, the aim of the exercise is for participants to talk for sixty seconds on a given subject. The catch is that they must talk about the subject whilst attempting to keep within the rules!

> You will need: **A big space with no chairs, pairs of items for matching (could be cards, wrapped chocolates or sweets etc), a timer (bell, squeaky toy etc.)**

Time	Activity	Purpose and notes
15 mins	Explain that this activity is based on the Radio 4 panel game. Each person draws a card/chocolate and finds the partner with the matching pair. When the timer starts you have 'just a minute' (usually 5 minutes) to tell your partner (without hesitation, deviation or repetition): • Your name • Your projectarea of work • Why you like working there • The best thing your project accomplished last year. When the timer goes off the speaker becomes the listener. After a further 5 minutes people move to a different pair.	• Get to know each other • Share information about projects • The questions within the structure can be varied according to the group needs.

ACTIVITY

Breaking the ice

- Allowing time at the start of each session for the group to 'connect up' again, and to familiarise themselves with the aim of the session is really important. Don't feel you can only use an icebreaker at the first session - groups may take time to feel comfortable so you might want to run a short icebreaker each time you meet.

- The roundtable 'tell us your name, role and organisation' is difficult for some people - particularly if they are anxious about talking in a group or have problems with their memory. Also if you're trying to build a more equal platform for discussion it's sometimes helpful not to get people focussed on their job titles (and thus their perceived power). One way to get around this is to use sticky labels as name tags, or (like the Scottish Government) formal place-cards with names for the first few sessions.

- We often start sessions by inviting the group to break up into pairs. We've found that this can be really helpful for people to build relationships with at least one other person in the room. This often helps participation in the larger group come a little more easily.

- We've also found that the 'pass the envelope' task is particularly helpful when people are unwilling or too nervous to talk in a large group. Simply shuffling the cards and asking people to read others' responses is really effective in ensuring everyone participates, but no-one has to know who wrote what.

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Setting ground rules*

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Setting ground rules*

When suggesting the idea of creating a working together agreement or ground rules, we've often heard partners say things like:

'But, we've been working together for years, we don't need this'

'Can we not just get on with the work?!'

Stay strong! In our experience, taking time at the beginning of a process to discuss the working together principles is vital - these 'ground rules' guide how we will work together, so it gives the group something to fall back on if rules aren't being obeyed or if conflict arises.

The types of things you might include in your agreement are:

General principles

- Share information
- Be patient with the process
- Commitment to learning together
- Honesty
- We have all the knowledge we need in the group
- Prepare for each session
- Start/finish on time
- Each person is responsible for catching up on what they miss without disrupting the group.

During conversations*

- One person speaks at a time
- No jargon
- Confidentiality is honoured
- Sharing is expected
- Monitor the airspace you take and share your ideas appropriately
- Use open body language.

These types of things can be used as a prompt, or as the facilitator, you could always add any particular points that have been missed after the group has developed their own. The group should have the final say whether or not your additional rules are included.

* Adapted from Kinharvie Institute www.kinharvie.org.uk

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Spheres of Control - understanding your influence

Helping a group to focus their time and energy on things that they can control, instead of reacting to or worrying about conditions over which they have little or no control, is one step in the right direction of helping a group to understand their impact.

> You will need: outcomes cards, persona cards, flip chart (or lots of wall space), pens

Time	Activity	Purpose and notes
5 mins	Introduce the purpose of the exercise. Check that there is common understanding about outcomes and split the group into two.	• Sets the scene for the exercise.
30 mins	Give each group a pack of cards (each card should represent a perspective from a person involved in the project/process), and a pack of outcomes that you've identified for your project. In groups (or pairs) match the outcome(s) you think relate to the given perspectives (blu tack the card to the paper).	• Share perspectives. • The idea is that some perspectives will have control over some of the outcomes. • It can be particularly useful to pair up people who don't ordinarily work together, or who have vastly different roles.
30 mins	Facilitator puts cards on the wall and encourages the group to discuss: • Do any outcomes apply to more than one group? • Were there outcomes that didn't fit anywhere? • Can you identify the outcomes that are 'yours'? • What outcomes can I realistically deliver? • What outcomes can I realistically expect others to deliver?	• Helps the group to understand their role in the group, and that of others.

ACTIVITY

Spheres of Control - understanding your influence

Sphere of Control
Things over which we have the final say - we determine the outcome (our operational environment).

Sphere of Influence
Issues that we can influence - although we alone do not determine the outcome (relationships and interactions).

Sphere of Interest
These matters are out of our control or beyond our ability to influence, but we are still interested in them (social, economical, environmental states and trends).

Sometimes using images, or metaphor, can help a group get their head around 'outcomes' and understand their influence in a project.

For instance, we've used the 'Ripples in the Pond' analogy. In this metaphor, the rock is like a material *Input*, the person holding the rock is like a human resource *Input*. The act of dropping the rock is like an *Activity*. When the rock reaches the water, it creates a *SPLASH*. These are your *Outputs*. The *ripples*, spreading out from the splash are like your *Outcomes*, and then later your *Impact*. The edge of the pond represents the geographic and population boundaries of your project.

We've found that where people feel that outside forces are pushing them to act (eg policy or legal drivers), it is useful to acknowledge this by creating post-its or cards of these 'influencers' and using them in the activity.

Groups heavily wedded to the personal outcomes approach (eg Talking Points) may struggle to see the merit of outcomes for different players in the system ('It should all be about outcomes for the person!'). In this instance, it can be helpful to identify eg organisational outcomes as contributors or facilitators of personal outcomes.

Outcomes cards

Outcomes cards should hold the outcomes you've agreed for your project but you may want to add additional outcomes to spark discussion, and blank cards so that the group can create additional cards.

Persona cards

Persona cards should have the variety of actors within a system ie person who accesses support, carer, friend, service manager, commissioner, Scottish Government etc.

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THINK

Debate not conflict

If you anticipate that a session has the potential to be argumentative it is important to work with the group to think through how they will deal with these situations as they arise.

Ask the group the following questions:

What rules should we adhere to if we find ourselves getting into disagreements?

What can we do to ensure that we have a healthy debate, and not an argument?

Things you might come up with include:

- Always acknowledge valid points made by another person
- Never engage in personal attacks
- Don't dismiss an idea without due thought/consideration
- 'Take a breather' – halt the discussion to allow people to reflect before continuing.

As a facilitator, it can be daunting to make an intervention when conflict arises. Some strategies that you can employ to support healthy debate, not conflict, include:

- Staying neutral
- Observe the feelings in the group 'I'm hearing lots of raised voices... what's that about?'
- Observe your own feelings and share with caution 'I'm feeling frustrated - anyone else?'
- Point out differences so that they can be understood
- Insist that people listen (use the ground rules to support this)
- Ask people to paraphrase others' ideas (to seek understanding) before replying to their point(s)
- Focus on facts
- Be assertive – use tone and gesture to manage aggressive behaviour
- Ask people to prepare their points in advance - giving people thinking time before a meeting can defuse tensions and promote more clear thinking.

THINK

Debate not conflict

Dealing with conflict can be difficult – but it is important to remember that conflict is not necessarily a negative thing: different points of view are really important for making good, informed decisions.

We've found that it is important to separate out the different elements that create conflict. The first is to make sure that people feel heard. Let them vent, and listen to them. Without having the opportunity to get their point across, people will rarely be willing to move on to thinking about resolution.

The second stage is to help the group come together to find a solution. Argumentative groups are often very worried about being pushed to a false consensus so it can be helpful to clearly record points of disagreement, acknowledging their importance. In very argumentative groups you might want to think about a session which allows each participant, in turn, to answer the same set of questions, without being allowed to interrupt or respond to each other. The point being to get everyone around the table to make an effort to listen to each other.

Also, since people don't generally refuse to act on their own suggestions, consulting the group on what to do next is a really positive step.

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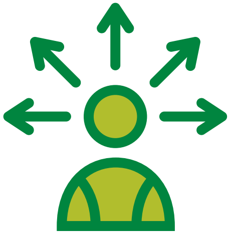

ACTIVITY

Let go of Control

ACTIVITY

'People support what they create'. A key way to support people to foster ownership of the process/project is to create a way for the group to co-define the process as they go. This helps ensure that the work is in tune with what the group want to achieve.

> You will need: **flip chart, pens and list of questions**

Time	Activity	Purpose and notes
25 mins	Brainstorm the following: 1. What should be the focus of the next session? 2. Who should run the session? 3. What extra expertise might we need? 4. How long should the session be? 5. What kind of activities should we do? 6. What needs to happen between now and the next time to move us forward? 7. Who is going to do what at the next session?	• Lets the group design the next session.

ACTIVITY

Let go of Control

Make sure you leave sufficient time to let people explore these questions. We've often found that when it comes to actions between meetings, issues such as time and capacity come up again and again. Help people to be as realistic as they can be about the time they are able to commit to the project.

This way of working means being comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty, and needs a proactive, constructive approach from all concerned. Your role is to help the group think about the likely format of each session – you might want to set out (from the start) that each session will have:

1. An introduction
2. A discussion
3. An activity (of some sort)
4. A reflection
5. Next steps.

Sticking to this format helps manage expectations and helps the group think about each section in turn. Feel free to offer ideas and suggestions, but allow the group time to consider their own ideas first.

Also, watch for the facilitator being assigned the majority of tasks. This can mean that they don't really believe that you're handing control to the group; or that participants are unsure of how to design a session or activities.

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Mirror Mirror

Through reflection, it is expected that the group will find ways to work differently via the opportunity to think together about their work, and their feelings connected to it. The role of the facilitator is to ask questions which provoke shared reflective thinking (including examining those things that appear more difficult to think about).

> You will need: flipchart, post-its and pens

Time	Activity	Purpose and notes
15 mins	**Reflection on process:** How did this session go? Encourage the group to be as honest as possible. Ask each person to complete a post-it note for each of the following questions: 1. What was helpful? 2. What was less helpful? 3. What would we do differently next time?	• Understand how the process is working for the participants • Elicit and respond to any concerns • Informs future planning.
15 mins	**Reflection on learning:** What are you gaining from being involved in this group? Encourage the group to be as honest as possible. Ask each person to complete a post-it note for each of the following questions: 1. What sticks out in your mind the most after the session? 2. What has most inspired you about the session? 3. What elements do you still wish to focus on?	• Understand how the process is working for the participants • Elicit and respond to any concerns • Informs future planning.

ACTIVITY

Mirror Mirror

If, in your role as a facilitator, you view reflection as a learning opportunity and effectively communicate this to the group, it can help to foster an environment of trust. For instance, if you are open to learning from others, and model the behaviour where everyone's contributions are treated as credible and educational, it serves to validate group members and to avoid arguments between them.

We've found that reflection is particularly useful during the mid-point of a project. It supports the group to remember all of the things they have accomplished and helps them set out what they need to achieve to move forward. Individually, it can encourage group members to feel that they have contributed and that they are valued by the other group members.

Similarly, the reflection component of the session should be built into the session from the start, rather than being an 'add-on' activity. Clearly stating this at the start of each session is important so that group members understand the importance of it for the group to work well together.

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Goals and success

Prompting a group to consider its goals and objectives in an organised way and from a variety of different perspectives can help provide clarity for a group which might be flailing. This activity is designed to help a group consider their overall objective, targets and indicators of success.

> You will need: Flipchart, pens, card

Time	Activity	Purpose and notes
30 mins	Present the rationale for the group of people coming together. Ask the group to work alone to answer the following: 1. What do we hope to achieve? After the group has reflected, open up for response from the whole group. Record on a flipchart. Seek agreement for the sentences that are similar, and those that are not critical. (10 mins)	• Establish common understanding of what we want to achieve through the project.
1hr 15	**Meeting the goals** Divide members into pairs and ask each pair to identify what the group needs to do to achieve this goal. (20 mins) Share these lists with the group. (10 mins) Ask members to work alone to write a target for each of the identified activities. (15 mins) As a group, review and fine-tune the targets and make sure they are recorded for distribution. (30 mins)	• Identifies the different objectives which could be potentially undertaken by different members.
30 mins	**What does success look like?** Ask the group to imagine a date in the future - eg one year from now - what will they be doing, saying and thinking as a result of the project?	• Create a set of 'indicators' which can be used to reflect on whether we are staying on track and to guide the project.

ACTIVITY

Goals and success

Goal setting isn't something that groups find difficult. However, making these goals realistic and achievable is a little trickier.

No matter how hard you work, you will fail to achieve goals from time to time. We've all been there! However, your failures contain lessons that can change the work of your group for the best, if you have the courage to learn from them. So don't be too upset if you fail to achieve your goals - just take note of where things went wrong and use that knowledge to reach your goals next time around.

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THINK

Checking in with the group

On this card we've identified common issues that a facilitator may come across and some questions/interventions you might like to consider in order to see how they are doing.

'I want to tell you about something different...'

'I just want to network'

When new ideas are emerging or when conversations go round in circles, it is important to bring the group back on track. Ask the group the following:

1. Do you think that the discussion is still on topic?
2. Do you feel like you are making progress?
3. How does that comment relate to the purpose of the group?

'I haven't read my papers'

'I don't see the point in all this'

When the meeting has been going on for a while, when people are withdrawn from the conversation or when people look tired/frustrated, it is your job as facilitator to understand what is going on for them and to identify what might make it easier for them to engage. Ask the group the following:

1. How are you feeling?
2. Do you all still have the thread of the conversation?
3. Would you like me to summarise where we've got to so far?

'Can't we just get on with it?'

'I know how to fix this... listen to me... I know I am right!'

When you are not seeing results or when it is evident that the designated agreed process isn't being followed, it is important to consider whether other processes might be more effective.

Ask the group the following:

1. Do you feel the current approach is working?
2. Do you think that we are making progress using this approach?
3. How much longer are you willing to stick to using this approach?
4. If this way isn't working, what should we do differently?

If the group do not want to stick to the agreed process, offer them an alternative, or ask for alternatives from the group. It is important not to be too wedded to your pre-designed process, if it is clearly not working.

THINK

Checking in with the group

Needs (and what people do when they don't get them met!)

These cards are aimed at facilitators of non-therapeutic groups; however, this doesn't mean that group members will behave harmoniously and focus on the task at hand. Problem behaviour is wide ranging from outright aggression, repetition, lack of focus, distraction and retreating into silence. When faced with difficult behaviour it is useful to take a breath and ask 'What is this really about?' eg listen for the emotion, not the content of the person's speech. Most problem behaviour in groups is about an unsatisfied need.

> **Behaviour:**
> repetition of the same point

> **Unmet need:**
> to be listened to

> **Behaviour:**
> side-conversations, yawning

> **Unmet need:**
> rest

> **Behaviour:**
> silence

> **Unmet need:**
> inclusion in the group

> **Behaviour:**
> distractedness, fidgeting

> **Unmet need:**
> humour and fun!

It can be helpful for the facilitator to think about their own reasons for acting/saying the things they do in a group eg the writer of this card often uses humour when feeling frustrated and it is important for her to know this so she can check if it is the right intervention to make.

The Centre for Nonviolent Communication (www.cnvc.org) has an exhaustive list of needs and the things people might do when their needs are not satisfied.

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THINK

General facilitator tips

There is no set time or tried and true method for when or how to intervene in a group - here are some of the interventions that we've found most useful.

Common ground

Always try to focus on the common ground in a group. This helps to get consensus around knowledge or expertise gaps, however, be careful not to push for false consensus. If the group really diverges on an issue, acknowledge the difference.

Holding ideas lightly

Many groups move quickly to criticism and evaluation of ideas before allowing time and space for exploration. This is an 'accepted' format for many meetings and group members (particularly those working in policy) may be paid to criticise in their day jobs! It can be helpful to share with a group actions that promote development and problem solving and those that do not. Asking the group to identify what phase the discussion is in (simply 'Are we evaluating or developing?') can help participants think about group behaviours that contribute to circular conversations, arguments or withdrawal.

Admitting 'failure'

Diverse groups, particularly where there is a power imbalance, often find it difficult to admit 'failure'. As a facilitator, it is important to focus on 'what went well' and 'what did not go so well', rather than to conceptualise learning as 'failure' or assigning blame. As a group, being able to share actual experiences - not just the good news story - is valuable, and if all are able to share, it is one way to help create an equal platform.

Time

Meetings don't have to last for one or two hours. Think about how long an activity or discussion might last, and plan for that time - not for a particular time slot. It is easy to fill time with additional questions or thoughts. If you plan according to what you actually want to achieve, it will mean that your session will be targeted and focused.

Continued over...

THINK

General facilitator tips

Car park

Groups can sometimes get stuck talking about a point of information where no one in the group has the answer. It can be helpful to have a 'things we need to know more about' flipchart or list for group members to contribute to. Our approach has been to then ask members to support the facilitator to do the finding out and bring to the next meeting.

Meeting outside the group

Speaking to a person individually about their behaviour in a group setting is something that many facilitators find difficult/scary. However, where behaviour is falling well outwith the norms for the group you are facilitating, you can help the person save face by checking in with them over coffee or during a break, rather than continually calling them on their behaviour in the meeting.

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THINK

Elephant in the room: Different types of groups

We've found that some groups are particularly difficult to facilitate. The next few cards will characterise these groups, and pose some tentative methods to consider and adapt if you find yourself in similar circumstances. Caveat: there are no magic solutions. This can be difficult and requires constant intention, attention, and practice. It will likely feel uncomfortable and difficult. But, if it isn't, then you're not doing it right!

3 Characterisations

1. The 'Snug as a bug' group

Characterised as a group where:

- Members share similar values and know each other well
- There is general consensus
- There is a lack of challenge - no drive to do things differently
- Everyone accepts the assumptions of the group (potential to lead to group-think).

ELEPHANT = lack of action

2. The 'Don't rock the boat' group

Characterised as a group where:

- There is a distinct power imbalance (eg providers and commissioners/ employer and employee)
- Some topics of discussion are taboo (such as money/resource/position)
- Responsibility is assumed to lie elsewhere - people don't take ownership
- The group don't feel empowered to make decisions.

ELEPHANT = power

3. The 'Can't group, won't group' group

Characterised as a group where:

- There are fundamental differences in the values and perspectives of group members
- Altercation and frustration are common features
- Conflict trumps debate.

ELEPHANT = values don't match

THINK

Elephant in the room: Lack of action

THINK

1. The 'Snug as a bug group' group

Your job will be to support the group to move from agreement to action and to configure ways to bring different perspectives into the room

> You will need: Paper, pens, hats (if you want to be literal about it) or labels (if you don't)

Time	Devil's Advocate: Activity	Purpose and notes
10 mins	In a large group: Generate ideas of three types of people that would hold a different view on the topic. If this is too difficult, you could use De Bono's 6 thinking hats to encourage people to take different perspectives.	• Helps to clarify that their way is not the only way.
30 mins	Split the group into three. Advise them that they each have to take on the persona of one of the identified characters. Allow the group time to consider: • What would these people think? • What types of things would they say? • What types of activities do they do?	• Group develops different theories based on the persona they've created.
15 mins	**Debate:** Set your question to the groups. Allow a spokesperson a maximum of 5 mins to articulate their point from the perspective of their character.	• Group hears a variety of arguments from a range of perspectives.
20 mins	**Reflect:** • What do we need to do differently? • What does this discussion mean for our next steps?	• Group considers what they've learned, and makes decisions on next steps.

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THINK

Elephant in the Room: Power

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2. **The 'Don't rock the boat' group**
   Your job is to help the group to feel safe enough to name the taboo

> You will need: Patience and nerve

THINK: The buck stops here

1. **Name it:**
   One of the most useful strategies in helping groups 'name' their elephant in the room is to bounce the issue back to the group for its consideration. To do this you can:
   - Make an observation: 'I notice that [name the person with perceived power] is always the first to speak'
   - Challenge the group with a question: 'Are you fully able to go ahead and implement whatever decision is made by the group?' You should follow up with a questions such as 'So, what kind of power do you have?'
2. **Use silence:**
   Letting the group live 'silence' can be very powerful. It gives the group time to absorb some of the awkwardness.
3. **Reflect:**
   Ask everyone to write down anonymously what they want in the group and what is stopping them. This gives the group time to think, rather than just react to the situation.
4. **Discuss in pairs:**
   Ask members of the group to discuss in pairs what they've written down. This builds confidence and courage – participants can speak from the place of 'we' rather than putting themselves out there.
5. **Group discussion:**
   Ask the group members to come back to the larger group with the response to the question. Have the person with perceived power talk last.

THINK

Elephant in the Room: Values don't match

3. The 'Can't group, won't group' group

Your job to help the group separate out the different elements - each constituent value set, the whole unit (two perspectives together) and the project itself

> You will need: Flipchart, pens

Time	Core values: Activity	Purpose and notes
20 mins	**For perspective one:** 1. Go round the room and ask people what their responsibilities for the project are 2. Explore what values this perspective holds.	The group members with a different perspective actively listen to the other side.
20 mins	**For perspective two:** Repeat the steps above.	As above.
20 mins	**As a group:** 1. As a whole, what did you notice about the answers you've heard? 2. Where there any surprises? 3. What is most challenging about this situation? 4. What insights are beginning to emerge?	Generate understanding in the group.
30 mins	5. What needs to happen now? 6. What new values will enable that?	Seek solutions that the whole group will be content with.

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ACTIVITY

Personas

Personas can be used for a variety of purposes:

- to act as stimulus to fuel idea generation
- as a useful tool to refer to and consider during a project
- in situations where it is not possible to involve a person who uses services

> You will need: A3 paper, pens, blu tack, a roll of paper for the wall, large post-its

Time	Activity	Purpose and notes
20 mins	**Develop a persona** Ask the group to consider a person that they've worked with over the past year where the circumstances were quite challenging. Prompt them to record (draw, write) the following about the person: • A name and picture • Demographics (age, ethnicity, family status) • Their likes/dislikes • What inspires them/their goals • What troubles them/their fears.	• It helps if this can be based on a real person.
45 mins	**Map out a user journey** Ask the group to map the persona's progress through the process, beginning with when they first become aware of the process through to when they leave. 1. Identify and group together related tasks in each of the key stages. 2. Identify the individual 'touchpoints' with each stage - the people, information, products and spaces encountered. 3. Identify links or gaps between touchpoints. Are these your action areas?	• Helps to identify any challenges within the process • Try to encourage as much creativity as possible. Ask people to stand up, draw, get involved • Explain that the journey map is based on real experiences, not on an abstract notion of how the process works.

ACTIVITY

Personas

Personas are a type of character profile and assume the attributes of the groups of people that they represent: from their social and demographic characteristics, to their own needs, desires, habits and cultural backgrounds. Using personas can be useful to help people see things from a different perspective.

We've found that when we bring a range of practitioners together, they are often able to recall someone who they've been in contact with that uses support to base their persona on. Having these personas visible and to hand during the project process can help to stimulate ideas. It is a particularly useful tool if the group are working with similar groups of people, as it helps the focus remain on their needs and outcomes, in this way their use can assist decision-making.

It is important to remember that personas can be used to represent not only people who use services - but also to represent a person or a group that you are struggling to communicate or work with. Thinking through the motivations and values of the person/group can help to crystallise strategies for working together, as well as to see things from their perspective.

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ACTIVITY

Create your own conversation (and compare)

This activity can be undertaken to either help you to personally prepare for a difficult conversation, or to help opposing sides in a group to tease out their differences.

> You will need: **Two large A3 pieces of paper with speech bubbles down either side for each group, pens and prompts**

Time	Activity	Purpose and notes
20 mins	**As a large group, ask people to:** 1. Define the topic or question that the group is struggling with.	• Helps to identify a key issue.
60 mins	**In two mixed groups:** 2. Use the speech bubbles presented to write out how the current conversation between yourself and the other group goes, from your perspective 3. Use the speech bubbles on sheet two to write out how you'd prefer this conversation to go, from your perspective.	• As a facilitator, you should provide prompts for things people would want to consider (see the reverse of the card for examples) • Generate greater understanding of both perspectives.
30 mins	**As a large group:** 4. Compare the two future conversations: • What is similar/different about the two perspectives? • As a group, how do we work towards a solution that is meaningful for both sides?	• Generate solutions and buy-in from all stakeholders.

ACTIVITY

Create your own conversation (and compare)

If two views are available we almost always pit them against one another as if they are mutually exclusive. This activity is designed to help challenge perspectives.

The use of a conversational approach means the people can be actively involved in identifying goals and working together on a project, and that there is more chance of 'getting it right' from the start. Using this approach means that each person's perspective is received and none are disqualified or struck from the record. It also allows honesty - people who know that their responses will be accepted like everybody else's feel free to say what they really think and feel.

We used this exercise with a group of providers and commissioners to help them have a discussion about outcomes. We considered using different archetypes or personas to help focus the conversation, but in reality we had all of the perspectives in the room, so didn't need to. You might want to consider this, however, if you are worried about sensitivities or putting people on the spot.

The question we posed for the group was:

As a provider: How can I tell you that we are delivering outcomes?

As a commissioner: How do I know that you are delivering outcomes?

We also offered the following prompts to the group:

- What are the types of data that will be collected?
- What are the types of indicators that can be expected?
- What type of relationship do you have/want to have?
- What type of processes might help this conversation go a little easier?
- In each column, consider as many ways as possible to demonstrate outcomes from both perspectives.

Caution!
Help the group to be as honest as possible, by providing the following guidance:

- Be specific
- Use words you'd actually say
- Use the future scenario to indicate your solution to the issue.

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THINK

Focused Conversations

The Focused Conversation Method (developed by the Canadian Institute of Cultural Affairs) is a questioning technique used in both teaching/learning activities and in day-to-day work situations. This approach involves using a sequence of questions which progress in four stages. These have been adapted below for our purposes.

1. **INFORM**
   (data and fact finding questions)

- What words or phrases stand out?
- What happened?
- What do we need to know and who can tell us?
- What's been happening with your work?

2. **EXPLORE**
   (ie drawing out meaning or explanation)

- What is this all about?
- What are we learning from this?
- What is the insight?
- How will this affect our work?

3. **REFLECT/FEELING**
   (your immediate feelings, how you reflect on the facts)

- Does that decision sit well with you?
- How did you feel when you heard that?
- What has been the most challenging part of the task, for you?

4. **DECISION/ACTION**
   (ie bringing the conversation to a close, making decisions)

- What is the next step?
- What do you think we should do?
- Who will take responsibility for this?

THINK

THINK

Focused Conversations

The different stages of questioning are important, so be careful not to omit them. In our experience, leaving out one or other of the questions leaves the group feeling 'stuck' and 'frustrated'.

Below, we've outlined the consequences of skipping a style of questioning:

- **Inform:**
  There will be no shared image of what the group is discussing; the various comments will seem unrelated.
- **Reflect/Feeling:**
  Those who rely on intuition, memory, emotion and imagination feel ignored.
- **Explore:**
  Group gets no chance to make sense out of the first two levels. No higher-order thinking goes into decision-making.
- **Decision/Action:**
  The responses from the first three levels are not applied or tested in real life. No action is taken.

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ACTIVITY

BYOE: Bring your own evidence (Like BYOB only a little more dry...)

This method is useful for exploring what we mean by 'evidence' and highlighting the differences in how people use evidence (and how convinced they are by different types).

> You will need: **Different type of evidence, a set of quality criteria and a set of evidence questions (see reverse).**

Time	Activity	Purpose and notes
15 mins	In pairs, ask the group to remember when they were last convinced of something. Ask: did evidence persuade you? What kind of evidence was it?	• Icebreaker.
20 mins	**Bring your own evidence** Group members explore their own evidence using the explore questions (see reverse) noting their responses.	• Look at the content, research design (where applicable) and key messages of own evidence.
20 mins	**Assess your own evidence** Group members explore the quality of their evidence using the quality questions (see reverse) noting their responses.	• Evaluate your own evidence, looking at the strength of the information and what makes it convincing (or not!).
40 mins	As a group, producing a table of responses that covers all of the evidence.	• Evaluate the quality of all the evidence.
30 mins	**Speak up for your evidence** The group then discusses the mosaic of evidence they have created: • Does the evidence broadly point in the same direction? • Does any of the evidence contradict? • What do we do with contradictory evidence?	• Find out if there is a key message/synthesis from the evidence or if the picture is contradictory or unclear. • The tables can be written up as an evidence synthesis following the event.

ACTIVITY

BYOE: Bring your own evidence

(Like BYOB only a little more dry...)

The purpose of the exercise is to understand how comfortable people are with different types of evidence. It may be useful to ask this question as part of the 'Speak up for your evidence' section.

Explore questions:

1. What stood out for me from the evidence?
2. What happened (what was done)?
3. Who was involved?
4. What factors led to the success/ failure of what was done?
5. What questions did the evidence leave you with?

Quality questions*:

1. Who does it apply to? What is the reach of the evidence? (eg individual, local, national, international)
2. Who did the research? What interests/ biases might they have?
3. Why did they do it? Are the reasons for creating the evidence clear?
4. Is it trustworthy? Is it honestly based on relevant evidence?
5. Can we use it? Does it provide answers to the question(s) it sets out to understand?
6. Is it understandable? Did you understand it? If not, what could they have done to improve it?
7. Is it enough? Did they speak to enough people; analyse the data correctly; come to the right conclusions?
8. Are the right people's voices heard? Did the evidence include the perspectives of the right people?
9. Are you convinced by the evidence? What makes it convincing? If not, what would you need to be persuaded?

Another way you can support a group to think about evidence, and the assumptions that individual people may make about evidence is to provide, 'Can you prove that?' or 'What's your evidence?' cards for each session. Ask group members to hold these up at various points in the session when they'd like to challenge what another person is saying. This works well in encouraging group members to challenge underlying assumptions that might be present in the group.

* Based on the SCIE/Keele Protocol for the assessment of social care research http://bit.ly/LN4uUU and Nutley, S (2010) http://bit.ly/N6sNfW

Other resources to help you assess the credibility of evidence available: **http://toolkit.iriss.org.uk**

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ACTIVITY

Advocate your point!

This method actively encourages debate and creativity. It can be particularly useful for reducing groupthink and polarisation due to the reflection time included.

> You will need: Blank card, sticky dots (for voting) and pens

Time	Activity	Purpose and notes
5 mins	**THINK** Present the key questions to the group. Two minutes silent brainstorming of thoughts and observations to the key questions.	• For generating as many solutions/ideas as possible.
20 mins	**GATHER** Facilitator gathers ALL responses (no comments from group) onto a flipchart and gives each idea a number.	• For keeping the group in a development (not evaluative) mindset.
15 mins	**TEST** Each participant chooses their top three (from their own or others) and tests it: • Is this idea do-able? • Will it make a difference? • Can I explain it clearly?	• Starting to evaluate the ideas and to select a solutions shortlist.
30 mins	**ADVOCATE** Each participant states their top three solutions and advocates for them (gives one or two reasons why each is important/effective).	• Some people think things to do with values are important and others focus on what will work - this form of advocacy allows both.
20 mins	**CHOOSE** Having heard everyone advocate for their top three solutions participants dot vote (three dots=most important, one dot=least important) for each solution.	• Voting gathers group consensus on ideas that will be taken forward.

ACTIVITY

Advocate your point!

When multiple solutions are on the table, speakers will alternately support one idea and criticise another. This mix can be confusing and easily becomes adversarial. The trick with this activity is to foster an environment where people can take turns considering competing ideas.

There is huge value in supporting the group to take turns considering each alternative proposal. In challenging the group to collaboratively develop each idea, all participants are asked to develop each idea into the best solution it can be.

The criteria for improving any proposal is defined as increasing the degree to which it addresses all of the previously articulated concerns as much as possible. The outcome of a truly collaborative discussion is that participants often realise there are multiple possible solutions to most problems - and often, ideas will merge or borrow from each other.

Caution!
If your shortlist remains too long you can repeat the ADVOCATE/CHOOSE round to further select.

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THINK

Get visual!

Over the past few years, IRISS has championed the use of data visualisation to help people interrogate data, improve their understanding and, crucially, develop confidence to use and question data. But overall, thinking visually often helps people literally 'see' things differently.

The five key considerations for visualising data:

Audience

What knowledge does the group have about the data you are presenting? To ensure that you present a holistic view of a set of data, you may have to provide visualisations of background data in addition to the data relevant to the point you are raising, or the issue you are seeking a decision on.

Data

Ensure that the data you are using is relevant and sufficient for the group to make decisions. Too much data can confuse the message you are wanting to convey.

Decisions

Ensure that everyone understands the visualisations and that the questions you want addressed are easy to understand and unbiased.

Consistency

Whether you are presenting many visualisations at once, or over a longer period of time, consistency is key to ensure understanding. Ensure that you use the same colour to mark the same variable appearing in different visualisations; use the same scales for graphs that will be compared; and when presenting data, regularly ensure that the same format is used so that the group can draw comparisons from previous versions.

Sharing responsibility

Can you share the responsibility for creating data visualisations with other group members? This will strengthen the knowledge of data in the group.

For ideas on how to present data, and for useful tools to generate visualisations:

http://blogs.iriss.org.uk/datavis/

THINK

Get visual!

Presenting data to engage a wider audience or to convey complex information can help participants to open up new conversations.

Using visuals within a group setting can help focus people on the decisions they have taken and are particularly useful for groups where literacy is low.

Here are some ideas to consider using in your sessions (remember you will need lots of flipchart paper and flipchart pens – at least four colours):

1. Draw a tick box next to possible options/decisions. Tick the box in red to confirm group decisions.
2. Practice and use simple key graphics that will recur throughout the meeting eg:
   - Decision
   - Point of information
   - Agreement
   - Disagreement
   - Next steps.

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ACTIVITY

What's your theory?

When facilitating groups there can be lots of different theories held by group participants, which are rarely verbalised. A result of this is miscommunication and mixed prioritisation of tasks, roles and responsibilities. Developing a logic model can help ensure that everyone is on the same wavelength.

> You will need: Flipchart, pens, template and ideas

Time	Activity	Purpose and notes
20 mins	**As a large group...** **DEFINE the problem/need/priority:** • What is the issue and who does it relate to? • What evidence do we have that this is a problem? • Is anyone else responding to this problem? What are they doing?	• Problems tend to be complex - this activity should help you define the element of the problem that is a priority for the group to tackle.
20 mins	**What INPUTS do we need:** • What resources are available? (people/money/experience) • What resources do we need to seek from elsewhere? **What OUTPUTS do we expect:** • In terms of activities (list) • In terms of participants (list) • In terms of documentation (list)	• Consensus around what you will need for your project to be successful. • You might want to have people take away actions from this section.
20 mins	**What will our OUTCOMES be?:** • What will happen as a result of this activity, will change occur? • Think about and record what might happen immediately, in the interim and in the longer term.	• Understanding the benefit of our activity.

ACTIVITY

What's your theory?

A logic model is just a way to tell the story of your project - highlighting the connections between the different elements, and how the project itself makes a difference. There are different types of logic models that you can use.

Evaluation Support Scotland (**www.evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk**) has a range of different support resources to help you devise your logic model.

You might want to issue the group with a basic template (and ask them to fill in the boxes) before the meeting to prompt thinking before attending the meeting.

The template could look something like this:

Situation / need	Inputs	Outputs	Outcomes

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ACTIVITY

Power in the positive

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a method for valuing and drawing out the positives and successes in the history of a group. It can be particularly useful in encouraging a group to consider their distance travelled as an entity, or to establish a baseline of where they've got to regarding a specific topic.

> You will need: **Ground rules, stories to share, post-it notes and pens**

Time	Activity	Purpose and notes
10 mins	Share the ground rules for Appreciative Inquiry with the group - make them visible for all to see in the room: 1. Look for what works, not the problems 2. Talk about successes not failures 3. Focus on how things can be better, not, what's wrong 4. Everyone has a story to tell – but let's stay focused on the story described initially 5. Ask questions (especially 'What if…') 6. Challenge group assumptions (eg How constrained is our practice? How widely held are our beliefs?)	• Helps to set the tone for the exercise/ field any questions.
10 mins	Invite a group member to share their experience of a time where (a) the group has worked really well or (b) the project has gone really well (alter for your own purposes). Direct this person to include the following in their story: • Brief background • Who was involved • Key features of the group/activity • Outcome.	• Start an appreciative process of enquiry around the group/project.

ACTIVITY

ACTIVITY

Power in the positive

Time	Activity	Purpose and notes
10 mins	**Questions for the storyteller:** • What enabled that to work so well? • Do you have a sense about what would help it to be even better?	• Assists greater understanding.
30 mins	**Questions for whole group:** • What do you recognise of your own experience in this story? • What elements would you elaborate/build on? • What can we learn from this story about partnership, process and practice? • What do we need to do to recreate these conditions for the next stage of the project?	• Share group experiences – the group collectively discovers the common themes about what works and what they can build on.

This is a really useful exercise for helping people to reflect on their past experiences and to focus on solutions – not problems. It can create a positive mindset but focusing on success rather than being defined by past failures.

Often, people find it difficult to think outside of what currently exists. You might find it helpful to have (up your sleeve) a couple of proposition wild cards to help people think outside the box ie cards that say things like ‘What if...’

DDD

A series of cards designed to support effective conversations in diverse groups. Created in partnership between IRISS and Providers and Personalisation (CCPS).

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THINK

Recording

Empowering the group to take control over the minuting is another way to foster ownership and action from within a group. Here are a couple of different methods for recording.

Shared minuting

> You will need:
Lots of flipchart paper
Different coloured pens

- Titles on three-four flipcharts: what we agreed to do (and who will do it) what we discussed, what we learned
- After each 'section' of a session give people five minutes to write up their key points
- Discuss and agree as a group - particularly decisions, actions and who will action them.

Visible minuting

> You will need:
Lots of flipchart on the wall and get the minute taker/scribe to write key points.

- This reduces the risk of unconscious bias on the part of the minute taker and encourages ownership of decisions.

Caution!
Minute takers may not be confident in minuting 'publicly'.

Graffiti minuting

> You will need:
Paper tablecloths/flipchart paper
Different coloured pens

Useful for: small group discussions on larger topics

- Each participant in the group notes their thoughts/discussion points on the tablecloth or flipchart
- No turn-taking required - everyone writes at once and can make links to other people's ideas in a visual way
- The results can be hung around the room for other groups to consider and discuss.

Caution!
The output from this type of minuting can be unwieldy, disorganised and difficult to aggregate/read.

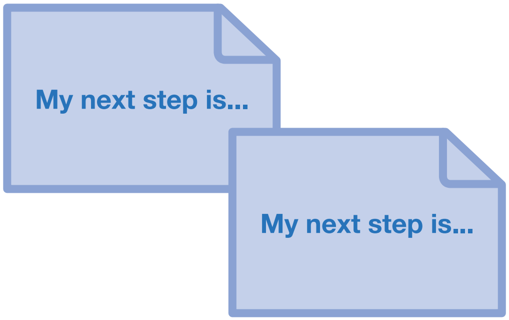
THINK

Recording

Recording action - what people will do after the meeting - is one of the most important elements of any facilitator's job.

Activity: My next step

> You will need:
A4 landscape handouts with *'my next step is…'* printed as follows, a flipchart, sticky wall or section of wall space



Participants identify their next step - write it on both sides of the paper. They then tear the paper in half keeping one as a reminder for action and sticking one on the wall to make a public commitment. Participants could also find someone and tell them their next step.

The facilitator can follow up the actions in an update on progress in between meetings with an email reminder asking people for their progress.

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