

## **“Facilitation Techniques to Make Working Groups Lively and Fun”**

April 13, 2015

### **I. What makes a working group valuable?**

During the introductions, participants reflected on a high-value or successful working group or community in which they are involved and what made it valuable to them.

- Interaction of ideas; energy of new members
- Listserv that provides useful information
- Learning and connecting to my work; Fun
- Share tools, connect with colleagues and accomplish strategic objectives
- Clarity of objectives
- Fast track a specific task
- Diversity of rich ideas
- Fun when we had a specific task (ex. manual)
- External impetus and WHO guidelines
- Brings energy
- Cross sectoral learning outside my core group; Experts from different groups
- Collective effort
- Unpredictable and fun
- Melting pot of ideas
- Frequent contact with calls and on-line communication
- See what is going on; who are the players
- Members committed and accountable to each other
- Engage people as individuals
- Network of experts
- Talking to people; new techniques
- Ask questions and get answers and advice
- Unexpected twists, fast-paced; changing and prizes
- Engaged member base; vibrant listserve
- Task team with specific to do's; sense of accomplishment
- Way to connect within a large group

## **II. How to assure a bad working group?**

During the TRIZ exercise, participants were asked “How can we make sure we have the worst possible, non-functioning, painful working group?” 1-2-4-All was used to develop ideas and produced the following list:

- No ability to express views or no room to participate
- No goals, direction, mandate or workplan
- No accountability or follow-up
- Lots of busy work with no purpose
- No prizes or FUN
- Late communication and no follow-up e-mail
- No meetings
- Long meetings with no refreshments
- No leadership or poor leadership
- Inflexible timing (especially across different time zones)
- Too many leaders
- Too many agendas

## **III. Actions that we can take to keep us from engaging in undesirable and unproductive working groups**

Participants thought about what we might be currently doing that in any way, shape or form resembled the unproductive list above. They then developed a new list of steps or actions that will help us stop what we know creates undesirable results. These ideas were written on cards and categorized on a sticky wall.

### **A. Planning**

- Plan meeting
- Plan well in advance
- Take time to plan meeting
- Consult with participants before deciding about meeting schedule
- Carefully plan and fix meeting dates and time taking into consideration time zones of working group members
- Schedule one hour per week for WG activities at beginning of week
- Agreement on who, when follow-up
- Brainstorm a really interesting topic for people to attend meeting

- Pre-meeting planning by co-chairs for next meeting
- Plan way ahead
- Have a set schedule with an agenda which outline accountability for actions and responsibilities
- Plan ahead to avoid having no meeting and conversely avoid having to cancel meetings (maybe set a clear time line, such as 2 weeks in advance)
- Plan ahead to include time for follow-up from meetings (1 hour minimum)

#### **B. Goals**

- Have a defined objective or terms of reference for the working group, with a defined duration
- Time-bound working group and not afraid to end it when it finishes (rather than find another purpose for it)
- Differentiate what type of group: Community of Practice or Interest Group or Working Group?
- Formulate a purpose for the group
- Define clear (SMART) objectives for the tasks at CORE and follow through
- Have a defined work plan and goal for the group and defined objective for each meeting
- Clear objectives—realistic with a timeline
- Develop specific objectives and work plans

#### **C. Meeting Process**

- Have guidelines for running the group
- Put follow-up activities (emails, calls, etc.) on list or calendar to cross off when completed
- Set up a reminder on phone/computer for follow-up
- Define time line
- Share responsibility for facilitation—drive motivation for participations
- Limit membership
- Prepare follow-up tasks before working group meeting to ensure more timely follow-up afterwards, e.g., disseminate action plans via email prior to the meeting to facilitate updates to plans, create template for meeting notes and assign notetaker with deadline for draft
- Make it fun! Co-chairs should brainstorm and solicit/survey members for fun ideas
- Social media use—use fun photos on Twitter or Linked In discussions
- After action reviews

**D. Leadership**

- Re-evaluate and/or retrain WG leadership
- Leader has a work plan and adheres to the guidelines and expectations for the group
- Ensure that each co-chair has a clear role/task in the working group
- Strong leadership (committed/available)

**E. Expectations**

- Ask members for ideas and solicit involvement
- Clarify expectations
- Have a plenary session at the CORE meeting to discuss working groups—ideas, things to change, etc.

**F. Accountability and permission to participate:**

- Negotiate dedicated time/LOE for CORE WG as part of annual work planning process
- Include CORE Group activity on your personal work plan at your job and dedicate time to it

**G. Resources**

- Explore funding for working groups

**IV. Bold ideas for a high value working group that attracts and retains members:**

Participants used 25-to-10 crowd sourcing to brainstorm, discuss and rate ideas:

A. The top ideas discussed were:

- Carve out a real working group with a clear purpose from the larger “interest group” (those on the listserv)
- Members plan and execute meetings
- Rotating agenda planning committee & chairs reach out
- Bring in new ideas (controversial) to discuss
- Thought-provoking questions
- Participatory approach to defining objectives and revisit during the year
- Humor

B. Ideas as written on the cards and scores:

- Carve a working group from the interest group; WG has a clearly defined purpose/end product and time frame (22 points)
- Have members plan and execute meetings (22)
- Rotate membership on the agenda planning committee (20):

- WG leaders reach out to 2-3 different WG members for ideas and to engage around planning next agenda to ensure everyone has voice and new ideas
- Ask thought-provoking questions to get ideas and participation (20)
- Bring in new or promising practices (controversial) to debate and discuss (20/19.5—one person rated the ideas as 3.5 but 4 with a good facilitator)
- Participatory approach to defining goals/objectives/purpose (and revisiting as needed) (19)
- Humor (19)
- Recognize them with participation awards; each meeting, one person is given praise or a certificate (19)
- Professional incentives (18)
- Bring in a famous or well-known expert in the sector of your working group during every meeting (18)
- Member of the month—highlight an engaged member (with PRIZE) (18)
- Only have membership in the WG for 6 months at a time with 1 deliverable required (18)
- Limit its duration so people know they will participate for “x” amount of time (17.5)
- SURPRISE—Keep things interesting by always changing what will happen (17)
- Develop common interest goals (ask members for ideas) (17)
- Creating space and time for all members to speak e.g., self-introduction and facilitator calling name again (16.5)
- Presentation from a well-known speaker (16)
- Start with story of interest (16)
- Ask members what they are working on in their organization and incorporate that into the work plan (14)
- Pay for level of participation (hold it in Hawaii, Fiji, or somewhere great (14)
- Member speed ideas sessions like speed dating (12)
- Group video and social media usage (11.5)
- Have people work on a tangible assignment they are already working on or that leverages work they are already doing (11)
- Give members opportunity to voice opinions and assume desired roles (11)

## V. Evaluation of Workshop:

In addition to written evaluations, participants provided the following comments on what was good (+) about the workshop and what they would like to see changed ( $\Delta$ ).

+	$\Delta$
We had an opportunity to do the techniques – learn by doing	Would like to add more time and have role plays; ex. fishbowl for practicing facilitation techniques
Addressed real problems	Would be great to have a workshop on running virtual meetings
Circle seating	Would like information on how to keep non-auditory listeners engaged in virtual meetings
Good networking opportunity	
Fun – ex. selling card ideas	

<p>Free for chairs</p> <p>All participating – there was a chance for everyone to participate</p> <p>Chance to be creative problem solvers</p> <p>Good examples</p> <p>Not boring</p> <p>Provided time for reflection</p> <p>Thought provoking questions asked</p>	<p>Would like to hear more successes from co-chairs</p> <p>Too CORE WG focused</p>
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