Facilitation Techniques

Phases: Setting the stage → Generating ideas → Evaluating ideas → Deciding

Technique	Description	When It's Useful	Cautions
Setting the Stage			
Eight P's of Effective Facilitation Planning and Preparation			Tools you use, people you have to bring through it, environment
Icebreakers for Diverse groups		For multi-cultural or groups of highly diverse participants	
Visioning the Ideal			
Is/Is Not Analysis	A graphic/narrative method of narrowing down or focusing by successively asking both 'What is it' and 'What is it not'.	Use it when you are defining a problem to decide what is in scope and what is not going to be considered at this time. Use it also when you are part of the way through a problem and you are not sure what you are trying to do and what is not so important. You can also use it when planning a solution, to help decide what to include and what to exclude.	
Cover Story Visioning Exercise	Participants imagine their idea, project, or organization as a "cover story" for a published magazine.	This activity provides a variety of tasks —	

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		including silent brainstorming, drawing, coming up with clever slogans— that provide people with many ways to explore their visions, ideas, and goals. It helps a team articulate a shared vision while having fun.	
Generating Ideas			
Freewheeling (popcorn) brainstorming	Members call out ideas. Write ideas on flipchart as they're suggested.	No need for individual contemplation	Doesn't work well for introverts.
Round robin brainstorming (going around the room)	Ask members for ideas in order. OK for anyone to "pass." Write ideas on flipchart as they're suggested.	People who tend to dominate. Introverts.	Can feel slow.
Paper brainstorming (write down ideas)	Members write ideas on notes/cards then post	Gets people moving. Can readily group ideas. Helps to distance people from their ideas.	
Small group brainstorming	Divide into small groups, then later share with whole group.	For large groups. Creates buzz.	Requires space. Can be noisy.
Reverse brainstorming	Helps solve problems by combining brainstorming and reversal techniques. Start with one of two "reverse" questions: Instead of asking, "How do I solve or prevent this problem?" ask, "How could I possibly cause the problem?" Instead of asking "How do I achieve these results?" ask, "How could I possibly achieve the opposite effect?" Once you have brainstormed all the ideas to solve the reverse problem, now reverse these into solution ideas for the original problem or challenge.		Same challenges as other brainstorming techniques. Might be confusing if issues not understood well by group.

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	Evaluate these solution ideas. Can you see a potential solution? Can you see attributes of a potential solution?		
Brainstorming Minus Assumptions	1. Hold conventional brainstorm. 2. Ask group to identify their assumptions. 3. Ask group to suspend assumptions & run brainstorm again for 15 mins., in groups of 5-9 people.		
Crawford's Slip Writing Technique	1. **Set the scene:** Give out sets of paper slips to everyone in the group. Depending on how many ideas you want back, give them anything from 5 to 50 slips. You can use chopped up pieces of paper or Post-It notes. 2. **Ask for ideas:** Ask the group for ideas on a topic. Be specific or general, depending on how wide a range of responses you are seeking. Tell them to write one idea per slip (otherwise you will receive lots on one slip from enthusiastic participants. 3. **Collect the answers:** When they are slowing down and running out of ideas, or after a predetermined period (usually several minutes), ask them to hand in the slips. 4. **Collate the answers:** Off-line, you can explore and collate the answers, for example grouping them into similar categories and using these to trigger further thoughts.	Use it when you want to get ideas from a large group of people. Use it when you do not have time or ability to discuss ideas, and just want to collect people's thoughts. Use it when you want to engage an audience, giving them a sense of involvement	You'll get lots of ideas but no sorting or filtering (or group discussion). Not an engagement technique.
Segmented Brainstorm	1. Break problem into parts/dimensions. 2. Assign each member a part/dimension. 3. Generate lists relevant to the assigned dimensions.		
Managing Long Lists (consolidating)			
Affinity diagram	1. Describe the problem or issue 2. Generate ideas by brainstorming. Write each idea on a separate sticky note and put these on a wall or flip chart. Remember to: Emphasize volume. Suspend judgment. Piggyback on other ideas.	Great tools for assimilating and understanding large amounts of information.	Takes time if you do the brainstorming and sorting "on-line" with participants.

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	3. Sort ideas into natural themes by asking: What ideas are similar? Is this idea connected to any of the others? If you're working in a team: Separate into smaller groups of 3 to 4 people. Sort the ideas IN SILENCE so that no one is influenced by anyone else's comments. Keep moving the cards around until consensus is reached. 4. Create total group consensus: Discuss the shared meaning of each of the sorted groups. Continue until consensus is reached. If some ideas do not fit into any theme, separate them as "stand-alone" ideas. If some ideas fit into more than one theme, create a duplicate card and put it in the proper group. Try to limit the total number of themes to between five and nine. 5. Create theme cards (also called affinity cards or header cards): Create a short 3-5 word description for the relationship. If you're working in a group, do this together, out loud. Write this theme/header on a blank card and place at the top of the group it describes. Create a "super-headers" where necessary to group themes. Use a "sub-header" card where necessary as well. 6. Continue to group the themes/headers until you have reached the broadest, but still meaningful, categories possible: Draw lines connecting the super-headers, themes/headers, and sub-headers. You'll end up with a hierarchical structure that shows, at a glance, where the relationships are.		
Importance/Urgency Mapping	A list of tasks or ideas can be split into urgent and important to help in sorting them using a matrix system. Urgent tasks are deadline based. This is usually independent of you and is often driven by others. The sooner the task needs completion the More urgent it is. This is not related to importance.	Urgency/Importance mapping is best for when you've got a long list and items are jumbled together in a way that 'not so urgent and not so important' are mixed together with	Might not work with large sets of issues or large groups.

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	The importance of a task drives how much 'time' you want to spend on it. Notice that this is independent of 'urgency' and is what you want to do not what you actually spend on it. For any task the quality of your output will often relate to the time you spend on it. A simple way of visualizing importance vs. urgency is to draw a two-dimensional chart on a flipchart or whiteboard and stick Post-It Notes up with one action to be done on each note.	the 'urgent and important' so that we tend to forget to prioritize the latter. When we categorize our tasks into its urgency and importance, we're able to see at a glance all the things we need to prioritize.	
Evaluating Ideas			
Six thinking hats	To use Six Thinking Hats to improve the quality of your decision-making, look at the decision "wearing" each of the thinking hats in turn. Each "Thinking Hat" is a different style of thinking. These are explained below: * White Hat: With this thinking hat, you focus on the data available. Look at the information you have, and see what you can learn from it. Look for gaps in your knowledge, and either try to fill them or take account of them. This is where you analyze past trends, and try to extrapolate from historical data. * Red Hat: Wearing the red hat, you look at the decision using intuition, gut reaction, and emotion. Also try to think how other people will react emotionally, and try to understand the intuitive responses of people who do not fully know your reasoning. * Black Hat: When using black hat thinking, look at things pessimistically, cautiously and defensively. Try to see why ideas and approaches might not work. This is important because it highlights the weak points in a plan or course of action. It allows you to eliminate them, alter your approach,	"Six Thinking Hats" is a powerful technique that helps examine decisions from a number of different perspectives. It helps you understand the full complexity of a decision, and spot issues and opportunities that you might otherwise not notice.	Hard to do with a large number of issues or people.

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	or prepare contingency plans to counter problems that arise. Black Hat thinking helps to make your plans tougher and more resilient. It can also help you to spot fatal flaws and risks before you embark on a course of action. Black Hat thinking is one of the real benefits of this technique, as many successful people get so used to thinking positively that often they cannot see problems in advance, leaving them under-prepared for difficulties. * Yellow Hat: The yellow hat helps you to think positively. It is the optimistic viewpoint that helps you to see all the benefits of the decision and the value in it, and spot the opportunities that arise from it. Yellow Hat thinking helps you to keep going when everything looks gloomy and difficult. * Green Hat: The Green Hat stands for creativity. This is where you can develop creative solutions to a problem. It is a freewheeling way of thinking, in which there is little criticism of ideas. A whole range of creativity tools can help you here. * Blue Hat: The Blue Hat stands for process control. This is the hat worn by people chairing meetings. When running into difficulties because ideas are running dry, they may direct activity into Green Hat thinking. When contingency plans are needed, they will ask for Black Hat thinking, and so on. You can use Six Thinking Hats in meetings or on your own. In meetings it has the benefit of defusing the disagreements that can happen when people with different thinking styles discuss the same problem.		
Clarifying evaluation criteria	1. Ask group to brainstorm answers to: "By doing this [strategy, project, etc.], what are we trying to accomplish?" 2. On new flipchart titled "selection criteria," ask group to	To gain agreement on a list of 5 or fewer criteria	

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	reword each item as a statement of a possible selection criterion. 3. Explain that list will be reduced to at most 5 criteria. Break into small groups and discuss which seem most important and why. 4. Reconvene & have small groups advocate for 5. 5. Have everyone choose top 5, then tally.		
Multivoting	1. Ensure clarity about meaning of each item on list. Can combine like ideas. 2. Clarify criteria members should use to make choices. 3. Determine how many votes each member gets (# members divided by 3 works well). 4. Clarify voting rules (e.g., whether can apply >1 vote to a single item). 5. Vote & tally. 6. Clarify what will happen to all items.	To narrow a list, as long as it's ok that some items may drop off completely. To get a quick read on a group's priorities.	Not appropriate when group needs to carefully consider each item on a list or incorporate each idea into a final recommendation. Shouldn't be used to avoid a difficult but important decision.
Pick 3/Drop 3	Variation on multivoting. 1. Ask members to review list & select 3 they believe should stay on list for consideration. Mark them w/ checkmark or green dot. 2. Members select 3 they think should be deleted. Mark w/ "X" or red dot. 3. Review list w/ group. If group agrees the ones w/ most dotes can be removed, do so. 4. If long list, repeat. 5. Once list is narrowed, use evaluative tools to determine best idea(s).	To narrow list faster than by multivoting. To identify highest or lowest priorities of a list.	
Nominal Group Technique	1. Each member individually ranks preferences. 2. For each option, as supporter to make case. Others may add or refute, but no general discussion. 3. Group members can change order based on comments. 4. Record each member's ranks on flipchart. 5. Tally scores for each option. 6. Tally scores (lowest total=highest rank). 7. Check-in w/ group about results.	Provides chance for people to share reasons for choices efficiently and to persuade others. To avoid debates & power struggles. To manage strong differences in values.	

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Option Comparison Grid	1. Develop criteria that final choice must meet in order to go forward. 2. Develop second set of criteria that would add value but not be required. 3. Compare each option to each "must" criteria and toss those out that don't meet it. 4. Compare each option that has met all "must" criteria to "add value" criteria. Write comments. 5. Compare all options, then assess which best match criteria. 6. Check back with group on results.	To evaluate multiple options against set of criteria	
Deciding			
Formal Consensus building	Lots of different types of formal consensus processes.	Consensus refers to a rigorous decision-making model with specific roles and vocabulary. In a healthy consensus group, people seek the wisdom of the group instead of pushing their personal agendas, and decisions are made through mutual consent. The course of action is something that everyone can consent to, not that everyone loves, or even agrees with, but that everyone can live with. A decision can go forward even when people disagree with it, if they "stand aside."	Can be slow and has potential to be contentious or unsatisfying if not managed well. Requires patience and understanding of consensus rules being used.

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Stepladder technique	The Stepladder Technique has five basic steps. Here's how it works. Step 1: Before getting together as a group, present the task or problem to all members. Give everyone sufficient time to think about what needs to be done and to form their own opinions on how to best accomplish the task or solve the problem. Step 2: Form a core group of two members. Have them discuss the problem. Step 3: Add a third group member to the core group. The third member presents ideas to the first two members BEFORE hearing the ideas that have already been discussed. After all three members have laid out their solutions and ideas, they discuss their options together. Step 4: Repeat the same process by adding a fourth member, and so on, to the group. Allow time for discussion after each additional member has presented his or her ideas. Step 5: Reach a final decision only after all members have been brought in and presented their ideas.	The Stepladder Technique is a step-by-step approach that helps you ensure that all members of a group participate and are heard. The technique allows shy, quiet people to present their ideas before other group members can influence them, and it allows everyone to hear many different viewpoints before reaching a final decision.	Can be slow. Not for large groups.
Six thinking hats	See above.		
Paired comparisons	See above.		
Option comparison grid	See above.		

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