An introduction to

**FACILITATING GROUPS**

**in an Enabling Good Lives Context**

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**Acknowledgement**

The majority of these resources were initially developed by Mark Benjamin between 1989 – 1999. Since 2000, the resources have been adapted for use by SAMS and Care Matters. More recently, these resources have been reviewed, refined and expanded to ensure alignment with the Enabling Good Lives (EGL) approach. Versions have been used with a variety of EGL based groups. This resource was funded and supported by the EGL National Leadership Group (NEGL).

**Introduction**

The Enabling Good Lves (EGL) movement is based on concepts and practices including:

* Mana Kotahitanga (strength and integrity of unity)
* Collective action
* Co-development
* Partnership

Central to these concepts is the formation and operation of “groups”.

Facilitation can be a way to make it easier for groups to operate.

In an EGL context, facilitators work actively to assist a group to develop in line with the EGL principles and vision.

This resource is intended to support EGL aligned facilitation approaches.

**How to use this resource**

This resource contains a range of materials from discriptions of EGL-based facilitation approaches to “checklists” related to facilitation in this context. It is imagined this resource can be used in multiple ways.The potential uses of this resource includes being:

* material for personal consideration and self-reflection
* a catalyst for group discussions
* materials for “training sessions”

**Caveat**

This resource is offered in good faith and does not purport to guarantee success; nor is it intended to describe the only way to facilitate meetings.

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**The role of a facilitator in an EGL context**

**Typically,** a facilitator’s role is to “make it easier” for the group to achieve its purpose.

This usually involves things like: creating safe spaces, clarifing direction, making sure everyone can contribute, monitoring dynamics and process, checking progress and introducing “group frameworks or tools” as needed.

An EGL aligned facilitator is not passive or neutral. The facilitator role is to actively support the shift of authority from the system to disabled people and their families, in a princpled way.

**Facilitation aligned with EGL**

**Within an EGL context**, there are additional elements for a facilitator to consider.

These include:

* Having a credible understanding of the EGL approach (if it is an EGL aligned process then the facilitator needs to be EGL informed!)
* The deliberate shifting of power so disabled people and families are enabled to lead the process
* Negotiating the inevitable controversy and conflict that occurs when a power balance is changed (i.e. facilitators need a degree of comfort and confidence in managing conflict)
* Ensuring that the information provided is accessible and easy to understand
* Doing more regular “process checks” to make sure the way the group is operating works for all participants (with disabled people being the key informer)
* Breaking things down into achievable steps (from the perspective of the disabled people and families who are participants)
* Shifting authority so that the group takes increasing responsibility for how it operates (this will vary considerably from group to group)
* Demonstrating the EGL principles in action

**Enabling Good Lives Prinicples**

These concepts are the basis for all decisions and actions

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Self-determination** | Disabled people are in control of their lives. |
| **Beginning early** | Invest early in families and whānau to support them; to be aspirational for their disabled child; to build community and natural supports; and to support disabled children to become independent, rather than waiting for a crisis before support is available. |
| **Person-centred** | Disabled people have supports that are tailored to their individual needs and goals, and that take a whole life approach rather than being split across programmes. |
| **Ordinary life** **outcomes** | Disabled people are supported to live an everyday life in everyday places. They are regarded as citizens with opportunities for learning, employment, having a home and family, and social participation - like others at similar stages of life. |
| **Mainstream first** | Disabled people are supported to access mainstream services before specialist disability services. |
| **Mana enhancing** | The abilities and contributions of disabled people and their families are recognised and respected. |
| **Easy to use** | Disabled people have supports that are simple to use and flexible. |
| **Relationship building** | Supports build and strengthen relationships between disabled people, their whānau and community. |

**Profile of a facilitator[[1]](#footnote-1)**

**When considering who may be an appropriate facilitator, or exploring facilitator development, it is useful to consider whether they have/demonstrate the following characteristics/practices:**

**Belief** A commitment to the importance of change

**Clarity** Certainty about the purpose of any change

**Congruence** Ensuring the way change is approached is consistent with stated values and the desired destination

**Optimism** Trusting change is not just desirable but possible

**Flexibility** Adapting to new knowledge as it appears

**Alliances** Creating allies

**Exposure** Exploring new ways of looking at things and doing

things

**Creating spaces** “Having a go” at something different

**Behavioural Focus Areas for a Facilitator**

Below are some practices to be cultivated that are linked to some of the core EGL principles

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Key EGL Principle** (related to facilitation**)** |  | **Some areas of focus** |  | **Facilitator behaviour** |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **Mana enhancing** |  | Respect and valuing |  | Being accepting and “present” |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **Relationship building** |  | Trust and mutuality |  | Being open and ‘do what you say you will do” |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **Easy to use** |  | Clear and ‘one step at a time’ |  | Using plain language and having humility |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **Self-determination** |  | Fluid and responsive |  | Being creative and flexible |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **Beginning early** |  | Proactive |  | ‘Paying attention’ and reading clues |

**Introduction to Facilitation**

**Facilitation in a Kiwi Context**

**Mana Enhancing**

The way the facilitator interacts with people enables them to develop/maintain dignity and be/remain strong (even if people have different perspectives!)

**Casual** (not formal)

Facilitators approach things in a relaxed and flexible manner.

**Reading Clues**

The facilitator pays close attention to subtle detail

**Fairness**

Equity is obvious

**Innovation**

The facilitator appeals to people to develop new ways of approaching things

**Trust via ‘instinct’ + evidence + relationship** (not role/position)

Developing trusting and mutual relationships is a priority task

**Credibility**

|  |
| --- |
| **Building Credibility[[2]](#footnote-2)**  **“Credibility = Trust + Expertise”**  **“Your own credibility manifests itself on two levels:**   * **Your ideas**. For you to be credible, your ideas must be perceived as sound. * **You as a person**. Other people must view you as believable, trustworthy and sincere.” |

**Key Elements of Facilitation**

**Below are some of the key components of being an active facilitator.**

Passive facilitation is not typically associated with an EGL approach as the role requires facilitators to:

1. Demonstrate the EGL principles in practice
2. Equip group members with skills they can use
3. Shift power balances to ensure disabled people and families can lead

**Components**

* Understand the stages a group is likely to go through and strategies that enable this to happen in a constructive way
* Keep the content (what is being discussed) separate from the process (how things are discussed)
* Break tasks down into small achievable steps (paint a picture of the vision/destination/objective …. then, concentrate on one step at a time while structuring success)
* Be active - not passive (make sure everyone has the opportunity to be heard)
* Model what you want (honesty, respect, openness)
* Pay attention to physical comfort
* Have regular process checks (how are people feeling?)
* Flexibility - go where the energy is (adapt as the group moves)
* Look for common threads/themes

**Key Tasks as a Facilitator**

**As a facilitator, these tasks are central to your role:**

Group facilitation- some key ‘technical’ skills

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| Developing group culture |  | Connecting and setting the tone (e.g. mihi – greetings/acknowledging, whanaungatanga – relationship building, manakitanga – kindness/support, rangatiratanga – leadership/authority, kotahitanga – unity/collective action and wairuatanga – spirituality)  Demonstrating (being) what you expect from group members  Co-developing guidelines/rules/ approaches to working together |
| Opening things up |  | Creating “space” (safe, honourable)  Open questions  Paraphrase  Reflecting feelings  Matching/mirroring  Ensuring equitable opportunity for “talk space” |
| Closing things down |  | Summarising  Redirecting  Process checks and adaptation  Confrontation  “Where to from here” approaches |
| Effective action |  | Planning for action  Monitoring and review processes |

# Structuring a Meeting

The following is a suggestion regarding how meetings can be structured. In an EGL context, building relationships is a central objective. More time may be appropriate for enabling people to “connect” than in some other meeting environments.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **What** | **Why** | **How** |
| **Opening** | Setting the scene, uniting people and creating a space with a purpose. | Welcoming members, karakia - prayer or thought for the meeting |
| **Connecting** | Whakawhanaungatanga - establishing relationships | If there are new members – go around the group for people to introduce themselves (and how they connect to the meeting)  If people know each other – briefly share something that is ‘on top’ for them e.g. “what’s on top for me” |
| **Direction setting / Purpose** | Clarity of purpose and objectives |  |
| **Likely Processes** | Establishing / reinforcing EGL approach and group tikanga – practice/procedure | Affirm how discussions will happen and decisions will be made |
| **Review** | Progress check | Clarity, consensus check and next steps (Actions) |
| **Closing** | Acknowledgement | Thank people for contribution, next meeting, tasks before the next meeting and karakia |

# Maximising the effectiveness of meetings

Below are some things to consider when facilitating a meeting,

**Consider the general functions of a meeting**

Appreciating the multiple functions of a meeting can assist facilitatorsto have perspective when prioritising what happens during the meeting. Some functions to consider include:

1. Developing a sense of “collective” identity and strength
2. A space to connect with others
3. A place where members explore, refine and up-date collective (group) knowledge
4. The “creative heart and mind” of the movement
5. A place where ideas are tested, amplified and shaped by discussion and debate
6. A place where individual members can understand how their personal contributions fit with the goals of the wider group
7. An environment where stars are surfaced and rouges are restrained (a place of endorsement and accountability to the whole)

**Before a meeting**

1. **Determine/clarify the purpose of the meeting**

How will the success of the meeting be determined?

1. **Determine/clarify whether there are specific objectives that need to be prioritised**
2. **Develop an agenda**

This enables people to prepare for what might be discussed.

Note: in an EGL context, the meeting agenda may need to be adapted to the pressing issues for disabled people and families “on the day”

1. **Ensure any preliminary information/papers have been circulated well in advance of the meeting**.

Note 1: in an EGL context, some group members may need to consult with wider networks prior to presenting a perspective at a meeting, so circulating material prior to the meeting is important

Note 2: in some instances, material may be confidential to immediate group members. If this is the situation, these papers need to me clearly marked as confidential to group members

1. **Double check that all of the group members, and those that are part of some people’s reasonable accommodation (meeting assistant, interpreters etc), have the meeting details**

**During a meeting**

1. Ensure the meeting follows a clear process
2. Encourage all to contribute (specific strategies may need to be used to create the space for some people to contribute)
3. Keep the discussion focused
4. Encourages different perspectives to be presented
5. Keep balance between the task (getting something done) and maintenance (how individuals are feeling)
6. Paraphrase and/or positively reframe contributions
7. Establish a difference between factual information and people’s opinions (both are valuable!)
8. Encourage the group to come up with options – not single solutions
9. Monitor whether something is best worked on in ‘small groups’ or the larger group. If things are discussed in small groups, make sure there is the time for each group to feed back to the wider group
10. Check that all decisions/actions are understood by all present
11. Model concise, clear and constructive communication
12. Conclude the meeting with a summary of progress and acknowledging peoples time and expertise

**After a meeting**

1. **Ensure there is a timely and accurate record of key discussions, decisions and actions.**

Note: this might include: when the meeting was, who attended, who is responsible for actions, associated timeframes, how success will be measured and the date and location of the next meeting.

g) **Check the accuracy of the record of the meeting with participants**

h) **Reflect on what went well and what you, as the facilitator, might do differently at the next meeting**

# Making things easier in a meeting

This checklist provides a framework for the facilitation process.

Some aspects may be more relevant than others at any given time

* **Environmental Management**

#### Basic Communication & Listening Protocols

* **Ensuring safety**
* **Enhancing learning**

#### Keeping focus

* **Developing partnerships**
* **Monitoring progress**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Environmental Management** | **Make sure we are on time.** | Give ourselves time to become familiar with the surroundings and focus on what we are there to do. This is also a tangible message to the individuals/ group that we value what is happening. |
|  |  |  |
|  | **Ensure resources are in place.** | Powerpoint, whiteboard, previous plans etc are in place before the interview/discussion/group convenes. This is so we can pay attention to the people!. |
|  |  |  |
|  | **Create a clear space by removing barriers.** | Shift tables and chairs to demonstrate that you want to “connect” and so that people can see each other. |
|  | **Check heat, light, fresh air and external noise.** | Maximise comfort. |
|  |  |  |
| Basic Communication & Listening Protocols | **Ensure equitable “talk” space** | Formal Strategy - you can have a group “round” or assertively direct a comment to the individual/s dominating discussion e.g. “thanks, we appreciate your thoughts but I would like to hear from some of the others in the group for a moment”  Informal Strategy – do not make eye contact with the “talkers” when they are talking - instead look at those who have yet to contribute. If a “new” talker makes the slightest noise turn to them and pay full attention! |
|  |  |  |
|  | **Keep our mouths shut**. | Eat a peppermint, remind ourselves that we do not need to respond to every comment, listen to what is being said (as opposed to interrupting or waiting to have our say), not take comments personally (if someone states an opinion you think is “incomplete” or “untrue” we need to remember we don’t need to take responsibility for setting them straight immediately!). |
|  |  |  |
|  | **Introduce the unspeakable comments**. | If we guess that someone is not contributing, because they have different opinions from what has been expressed, then a facilitator can drop a few different perspectives into the discussion. A key thing is not to own the comment as our view or make a judgement in the way we state it. |
|  | **Introduce humour to a discussion.** | Tell a BRIEF and RELEVANT humorous story that relates to the situation being discussed or a joke (if there is one that is appropriate!). |
|  |  |  |
|  | **Check that the topic being discussed is relevant.** | Be direct. Ask them – “ I am wondering, is it worth continuing this discussion” or “ Is this going to progress what we need to focus on?” |
|  | **Being directive.** | Give people a specific format in which to contribute to a discussion e.g. “break into groups of four to discuss this then I want each group to feed back three thoughts about this topic” or “ we are going to hear one advantage and one disadvantage for this view/practice/situation from each person” – people are not (of course) pressured or humiliated to deliver this!. |
|  |  |  |
|  | **Create space and time.** | Some people are cautious and need time before they contribute. Silence is OK – for a while ! . This is really “keep mouth shut” again. |
|  | **Use communication/language appropriate to the group.** |  |
|  |  |  |
| **Ensuring safety** | **Explain the purpose, limits and “rules” of the discussion/group**. | A brief explanation of confidentiality, we are expecting diverse views, wanting open discussion and the individual/group having control of some aspects of the discussion/group will go a long way in putting some at ease. |
|  |  |  |
|  | **Demonstrate you will keep a group safe**. | Rapidly intervene if an individual in the group becomes discounting of someone else’s opinion. |
|  |  |  |
|  | **Request feedback early.** | Ask if there is anything that could be done to make the discussion more useful. |
|  | **Ensure personal judgements are hidden.** | Make a point of monitoring our own comments and body language so as not to give a message that we do not “like” or agree with perspectives expressed. |
|  |  |  |
| **Enhancing learning** | **Remember that effective learning happens with involvement, experience and relevance.** | When introducing a topic check the usefulness of looking at it now – better still, give the individual/group the lead and respond to where there is interest stated. Link anything you want to say to the experiences of the individual/group – find out about previous experiences people have had regarding the topic, and give people a chance to express their thoughts BEFORE introducing “new” ideas. |
|  |  |  |
|  | **Let people struggle.** | If people find a task/idea challenging, there is no need to rescue them immediately. It is OK for people to find hard things hard! |
|  |  |  |
|  | **Give people a chance to make comment on a regular basis** | e.g. “what do you think of this approach”, “can you see this as useful in your situation”. |
|  |  |  |
| Keeping focus | **Stay focussed ourselves!** |  |
|  |  |  |
|  | **Ask “naïve” questions** | e.g. “so how does this relates to x” |
|  | **Paraphrase comments made so far** | e.g. “ in this discussion we have looked at “a”, “b” and “c’ – what other thoughts do people have”. |
|  |  |  |
|  | **Gently confront** | e.g. “ that is an interesting thought but I would prefer us to stay looking at “x” for a bit longer” |
|  | **Offer a contribution that refocuses** | e.g. “considering that we are looking at “x” one thought I have is …” |
|  |  |  |
| **Developing Partnerships** | **Be clear about our intention for a partnership approach and HOW we see this happening.** | Explain how you like to work with an individual/ group and the processes that are in place for shared decision making. |
|  |  |  |
|  | **State what we want then ask the group / individuals what they want.** | Model clear, direct and assertive communication and invite the group to do the same. Be aware that some individuals, in this environment, will challenge. This is healthy – providing the facilitator does not take it personally. |
|  |  |  |
|  | **Let go of control! Ensure there are clear areas of control given to the individual/group.** | At first start with simple choices and decisions like: “when do you want to break for morning tea ?” or “in what priority will we look at these areas ?”. Then move to more complex area of group decision making |
| **Monitoring progress** | **Keep track on how things are going.** | Remember Plan-Act-Evaluate – Innovate. Check out whether things are being achieved. If they are progressing celebrate and if they aren’t then adapt. |

**A facilitator’s role with guest presenters**

**The TACT approach**

Thoughtful Analysis – Constructive Tactics

**Purpose**

**How to assist groups and individuals to:**

* Keep a positive focus
* Relate to guest presenters in a constructive way
* Accurately extract key messages and avoid getting lost in minor detail or personal reaction
* Explore potentials
* Explain the advantages of implementing what you are promoting

**Steps**

|  |
| --- |
| **Prior** to information being presented  **Work with the individual/group to become clear about what they want to know/learn.**  If people have things they are not happy about, then assist them to translate “what they don’t like/want” to “what they do want”.    When interacting with the guest presenter encourage people to express information on what they are wanting (not expressing what they don’t want/like as a focus of questions or discussion)  If someone is caught up in a negative or aggressive way of seeing things you can:   1. Talk about the specific situation and de-personalise it ie what is the general issue that the specific issue is reflecting. The general issue/question is presented – not the “personal” issue 2. Find someone in the group who can represent the questions/opinions of others without “loading” comments |

**During the presentation**

1. **Exposure to information** eg guest

Ideally, the guest has been told what the individual/group is wanting before they present information.

If no previous discussion has prepared the presenter, then the facilitator can introduce the session with a few sentences describing what the individual/group is wanting to learn.

1. **Perception Check**

Is everyone understanding information eg clear language and ideas?

You may need to stop the presenter during their presentation and ask them to explain ideas/information in typical/common language

1. **Summarise**

Just before the presenter’s time is finished, you can reflect back to them what you believe are the main things they have said. This is to check the accuracy of what you have understood from them.

1. **Thank** the presenter for sharing their information/ideas (whether or not you have agreed with what they have presented).

**After the presentation**

1. **Determine the essence**
   1. What were the main points? eg What I think they were saying
2. **Identify personal response**
   1. What do I think and/or feel about this?
3. **Project the key points into the future**
   1. What might happen as a result of these ideas?
4. **Response – either a or b**
   1. Support the idea
   2. Suggest an alternative that you believe would have better outcomes

**Recording a meeting (minutes, notes etc)**

**Note: in an EGL context, the most important things are to:**

* Ensure any record of the meeting reflects the EGL principles e.g., easy to use, mana-enhancing +
* Negotiate with the group regarding how they want the meeting captured

**Keep the record of the meeting:**

Clear

Concise

Constructive

**General guide to recording a meeting**

* Record the date of the meeting, who attended, where they came from and apologies
* Consider using the meeting agenda as a basis for framing meeting notes
* Note progress against previous actions
* Use plain language
* If you want to use abbreviations then write it in full the first time
* Decide whether you want the discussion described, including who said what, or just the key themes of a discussion
* Be very clear about whether a decision is a consensus decision. This may involve stating how many people supported the decision, how many people were mixed and how many people did not support what the rest of the group decided
* Ensure any actions are clearly described (you may want to add a timeline and who is responsible)
* Check the accuracy of what is recorded (give group members the chance to make changes before the record is finalised)
* Think about whether the record will enable someone who is not there to understand how decisions were made
* If possible, add the next meeting time, date and place
* Think about whether there were documents referenced in the discussion. You may want to send these out, or include a link to them, in the record of the meeting

Suggested things NOT to do: don’t try and write everything that everyone says, don’t include personal opinions (this could misrepresent the discussion and consensus decisions for those not at the meeting) and don’t add the opinions of people not present (unless this is clearly identified).

**Group process and group dynamics**

**Definitions**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Group process** | - | "Group process is how a group goes about a task."[[3]](#footnote-3) The stages or phases that groups typically will move through. How people choose to work together in a group |
|  |  |  |
| **Group dynamics** | - | The interpersonal forces at work within the group. How group members interact. |

There are many theories, frameworks and models about the stages groups typically go through and the importance of facilitators paying attention to how people are interacting.

There is not one better, right or true approach!

What is often helpful is to find a framework you understand/like and use it as a tool when reflecting on how things are progressing.

It is important NOT to impose the model on the group – but, to use it to try and understand the dynamics between people and to assist with considering what might be an important “next step” or resource that can make easier it for the group to be effective.

The following page contains a compilation of ideas that give clues as to what stage the group may be at (Typical stages of group process and dynamics). All of the stages are important!!!

This framework can be used by facilitators multiple ways. One useful way is for facilitators to looks for clues/behaviours that indicates “where the group is at”. After determining this, a facilitator may be better able to design something that meets the **current** needs of the group. It is fundamental for a facilitator to observe what people are doing and how they are doing it – rather than simply what people say (or what they would like to believe). Typically, groups will have a spiral life where from time-to-time you need to assist people to revisit and refine something the group may have previously considered. This is OK. All of the stages are OK. The one thing that is potentially disastrous is for a facilitator not to meet people/the group at the place where they actually are in their journey.

**Typical stages of group process and dynamics**

**Continuums**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Stage** | **Dependence** | **Independence** | **Interdependence** |
| **What people are “typically” looking for** | Looking for: direction, inclusion, practical tools/frameworks and safety | Looking to: express individual perspectives, assert personal opinion and negotiate difference | Looking to: work co-operatively, be part of a “team” that achieves and to belong |
| **Language that reveals the possible stages** | “you”/”they” should | “I” think/feel | “we” are |
| **How choice is often viewed** | Compliance to predetermined options – looking for “the answer” or for “what we have to do” | Limited or chaotic choice | Informed choice and flexibility (adapt as you go) |
|  | Paper focus | Person focus | Collective or Community Focus |
| **Roles for a facilitator** | Direction setter, demonstrator (possibilities and new practices), and safe-guarder | Educator, supporter, catalyst, permission giver and mediator | Facilitator and acknowledger |
| **Relationship**  **characteristics** | Dominant – Submissive relationships | Conflict or competition | Partnerships |
|  | Prescribe | Educate | Facilitate |
|  | Reactive | Responsive | Creative |
|  | Problem – deficit | Potential | Participation |
| **Power/ Authority** | Hierarchy | Chaos - conflict | Collaboration - equity |
|  | “Few” have power | Fight / Flight | Collective power |
|  | Inequality | Struggle | Equity |
|  | Rigid roles | Challenge | Flexibility |
| **Lessons** | Direction, vision, clarity, provision, nurturing, safe spaces, education, giving and receiving | Decision-making, identity, communication, assertiveness, conflict resolution, positive reframing, respect and personal boundaries | Inclusion, citizenship, contribution, unity, community, legacy and collective power |
|  | Sameness (the pretence of…) | Diversity | Equity |
|  | Inertia – Imitation | Intuition | Imagination |
|  | Parent / child | Adolescent | Adult |

**The Facilitator role in managing conflict**

**The role of a facilitator**

Conflict between people and perspectives can be a healthy and powerful medium for learning and development.

Left unmanaged, conflict can become confusing, messy and destructive.

Managing conflict enables people to learn new skills in a safe and constructive environment while increasing the chances that an acceptable, or even beneficial, resolution can be reached for all involved. That doesn’t mean that facilitators can stop people feeling “attached” or “confused” or “angry”. It does mean that a facilitator can sometimes demonstrate, or even impose, a process that maximises the chance that conflict becomes a creative process.

It is natural for individuals or groups to see the world differently. Everybody carries their own perspective of a situation. For this reason, conflict is both natural and predictable. What is less certain is what skills individuals have in ensuring that conflict is creative and constructive. Managing conflict enables safety to be maintained and skills to be developed. In the “worst case scenario”, a facilitator can assist the group to become stronger when dealing with someone unwilling to work co-operatively over time.

Until a person has experienced effective conflict management they may not have been exposed to HOW to work creatively with conflict.

**Some core principles**

Everyone is entitled to their perspective.

Processes must create equity.

Respect is an active (not passive) state.

Facilitators have the responsibility of ensuring conflict is safe and there is a constructive pathway (typically, people will take it).

Effective resolution is only possible when all parties have a willingness to clarify and resolve issues.

There can be unity in diversity.

**Practical Approaches to Managing Conflict**

1. **Awareness of Self**

Key Questions

* + What triggers me into being negative/destructive, not listening or not being prepared to express my opinion?
  + How can I manage my own behaviour in conflict (what do I need to feel safe and positive)?
  + What skills do I need to work on further?

**Strategies**

1. Obtain feedback from those around you related to your strengths and areas that could benefit from development
2. Obtain mentoring or supervision
3. Engage in self-reflective practice
4. **Creating a Safe Environment**

Key Questions

* + What do I / others need in order to feel OK about expressing thoughts, feelings and goals?
  + Have I allowed enough time?
  + Have people had a chance to think about the issues
  + Do I have enough basic skills related to facilitation?

**Strategies**

1. Develop a checklist, or set of guidelines, that highlight the key aspects of creating and maintaining a safe environment
2. Check with the group, and individual members of the group, that they feel safe to operate freely in the group.
3. **Gaining an Overview of Dynamics and Processes Related to Conflict**

Key Questions

* + What are the clues that a creative and constructive resolution is imminent?
  + Do I really believe conflict is potentially useful?

**Strategies**

1. Gain an understanding of group dynamics and process
2. Discover a ‘framework’ that enables you to assess where the group is up to
3. Create a framework to monitor what is happening.
4. **Constructive Expression**

Key Question

* + Can I describe what I want and how this will benefit all the parties?
  + Have I assisted group members to positively reframe?

**Strategies**

1. Learn how to make optimistic, clear, concise and specific statements
2. Become confident with the skill of positive reframing.
3. **Active Listening**

Key Question

* + Can I suspend judgement/reaction long enough to “hear” what others are saying?

**Strategies**

1. Use open questions and perception checking (paraphrasing and reflecting feelings are also useful on occasions)
2. **Facilitation**

Key Questions

* Can I assist a person/the group to see what they want – as opposed to what they do not want?
* Am I willing to look at options that I have not thought of before?

**Strategies**

1. Use positive reframing and planning approaches to assist members/groups translate what is wanted into how this can be achieved.

**Introduction to Negotiation Skills**

**What is negotiation?**

“Confer with another view to compromise or agreement. To arrange or bring about a desired object.” Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1969

“Effective negotiation is unifying two peoples (groups) ideas”. Nancy Highshoe, 1997

Successful negotiation is “following a few common sense rules to reduce conflict and turn it into co-operation and reach solutions that really work for all the participants.”

The Negotiation Skills Company, 1994

**Various Strategies in Conflict**

Control - trying to manage all possibilities to attempt to get what you want

Submit - giving in or giving over to another person’s position

Compromise - a process for settling for what appears to be fair and reasonable

**Negotiate - the process of clarifying expectations, aspirations and possible outcomes with the intention of both parties achieving what they want.**

**Where is negotiation appropriate?**

Where you need to work something out with another person (group) and there is the potential for conflict. It is sometimes wise to “negotiate” when approaching a person (group) in order to obtain something new or different than what is apparently being offered.

**Am I ready to negotiate?**

Do I: know that it is that I want?

know why I want it?

feel ok about working co-operatively?

think I am able to listen to the other point of view?

have some ideas / strategies?

have a back-up if negotiation is unsuccessful?

**How do I Negotiate?**

Everyone has personal needs and aspirations and often external requirements that need to be met. Negotiation means that we need to acknowledge that situations / roles may be different but that it is often possible to work in the “interests” of both parties.

**Components of Effective Negotiation**

* **Find common ground**
  + Build trust and rapport.
  + Establish a clear purpose for the discussion / meeting
* **State your interest**
  + Why you want a certain thing or outcome. It is of incredible advantage to have prepared yourself to the point where you can state this in one or two sentences. It is sometimes better not to state how you would like this achieved at this point. We have not got all the information yet as we have not listened to the other person.
* **Listen carefully**
  + Watch for non-verbal clues.
  + Silence is ok. Silence can demonstrate a willingness to hear the other point of view and it also can unsettle an aggressive response giving them time to withdraw comments that were not constructive.
  + Ask clarifying questions. Show that you are interested in their position and you want to understand it. This is ultimately to your advantage if you want to propose something that meets their needs as well as yours.
  + Reframe. If an apparently insurmountable problem is presented reframe it as a mutual challenge.
* **Explore options**
  + Separate the person from any seeming problem.
  + List possibilities
  + Ask the other person if they can see a way for you to achieve your aims.
  + Volunteer how your ideas may meet the other person’s needs.
  + Search for alternatives.
* **Summarise**
  + Ensure you are both on the same track.
  + Confirm any decisions made
  + Check if there are any outstanding issues
* **Develop a workable strategy / outcome that meet both parties’ needs.**

**If negotiation fails it is probably because:**

* there was not a willingness to work co-operatively
* one of the parties was not listening
* there were misunderstandings (no clarification)
* there were unresolved historical factors
* people didn’t come prepared

A checklist for facilitators involved in controversy

**A Environment**

1. Is the environment conducive to equitable discussion?

2. Can everyone involved see each other?

3. Is this space going to be free of interruptions for the time of the discussion/meeting?

4. Do comments need to be recorded somewhere so everyone can see them?

**B Personal**

1. Am I aware of what I am feeling in response to the conflict?

2. Have I clarified, internally, my thoughts/opinions?

3. Am I ready to be constructive?

4. What is my role here?

**C Professional**

1. Is everyone informed about the procedures and appropriate channels for discussions/debate/recourse?

2. Are we working for consensus?

3. Do I have observable/measurable examples to justify my comments?

4. Am I open to alter my opinions and work to a resolution that values all of the people involved?

**D Process**

1. How will I approach this situation so that the way I act is congruent with the principles and values I have talked about?

2. What do I need to do to ensure that everyone is able to equally participate?

3. How will people be valued for their contribution to the discussion?

4. What will I do that guarantees that I have heard and responded fairly to what people have said?

**E Outcome**

1. How will I acknowledge the time and energy people have invested in this process?

2. In what way will I check back with the person/group so that they see the results of this discussion/meeting?

3. Does the outcome incorporate all of the perspectives stated?

4. Have I highlighted areas of strength as well as areas that require development?

Controversy is often an important aspect of raising people's awareness.

**Potential strategies when responding to controversy**

For use in meetings/groups

1. **Describe Apparent Discrepancies**

*“On the one hand .... but, on the other hand ....”*

Key: Describe direct observations or comments without adding judgement or interpretation. This means the other people are not “attacked” or “judged” .... just, left in the place where they need to reconcile two things that appear not to be aligned.

1. **The (apparently) Naive Inquirer**

*“I/we are not sure what is relevant here ... tell us more about ....”*

Key: Framing our comment in a way that makes it clear we want to know/understand more. This enables people to be initiating the analysis – rather than defending against what they think we already believe

1. **Seeking “Clarification”**

*“I/we are getting the impression ...... it is possible we have misunderstood something . Please help us understand this better”*

Key: Again, there is an absence of the evaluation team presenting a “judgement”. We are simply presenting some information and requesting more information so we can achieve clarity.

1. **Presenting the Potential (not the perceived ‘problem’)**

*“ it appears as though people are wanting ......”* (although people may have expressed what they don’t want)

Key: this involves us ‘positively reframing’ the information we have received. Rather than presenting what people are unhappy about we present what people are wanting e.g. rather than dwelling on what “isn’t” we are exploring what “could be”

1. Adapted from “Creating a new way: working together for change”, SAMS, 2018 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Adapted from Power, Influence and Persuasion, Harvard Business Essentials [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. [What is GROUP PROCESS? definition of GROUP PROCESS (Psychology Dictionary)](https://psychologydictionary.org/group-process/) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)