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Common Facilitation Challenges

Facilitation is a complex process that differs markedly from other types of leadership and education. There are a number of considerations that facilitators need to be aware of as they help groups through the collaboration process. The following table provides an overview of some common challenges facilitators might face, the causes of such challenges, and some strategies to address them (Hanna, 2020).

Challenge	Possible Causes	Facilitation Strategies
Keeping the group on track	• Talkative people • People focused on their own knowledge and expertise	• Thank them, restate relevant points, move on • Acknowledge interest and refocus on agenda/topic • Refer back to objectives of the activity • Promise/give space for related tangents to be followed up: parking lot, handout resources, break time discussions, etc.
Conflict	• Personality clashes • Perceived hierarchies • Disrespect • Generational differences • Emotionally charged issue	• Get options from others • Note points of disagreement and minimize where possible • Draw attention to the agenda/topic/new question
Quiet or shy participants in the discussion	• Personality style • May be lost or confused • Cultural differences (familiarity; traditions; different approaches to time management; language barriers)	• Seek out their opinions • Sincere and subtle recognition • Include “introverted” forms of participation – reflection questions, pair discussions, etc.
Overbearing participants	• Personality style • Natural leaders • Don’t feel their point is being made • Well-informed • Over-eager	• Ask them challenging questions to slow them down • Let the group manage them to the greatest extent possible

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		• Use the parking lot to place some points up for later discussion (but don't let them just “die” there)
Use of discipline specific language / jargon	• Interdisciplinary group • Showing off • Unaware language might not be understood	• Ask for a definition or clarification for yourself and the group • Point out the group may not be familiar with a particular term
Perceived hierarchies	• Interdisciplinary group • Cultural differences	• Ask group members for different perspectives • Acknowledge value of all contributions
Disruptive group member	• Bored • Don’t see relevance of discussion • May not understand something	• Call on the individual by name and ask an easy question (caution – calling by name can sometimes generate additional resistance) • Repeat last opinion offered and ask for theirs
No one is talking/ contributing	• Instructions might not have been clear • Lack of leadership • An entire group of “the strong silent type”	• Arouse interest by seeking their opinions • Think-Pair-Share – allows participants to get used to talking in a situation where being silent is much more awkward for them (a pair discussion) – which segues into a group discussion
Wanting your expertise	• Genuine interest • Think there is a “right answer”	• Redirect the question to others • Reaffirm your role as a facilitator, and that there are benefits to peer-based investigation