

# Facilitator's Toolkit

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## Tools, Methods, Concepts

Strategic Engagement

2017



## The Communication Perspective

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Communication is often viewed as a tool for transmitting information and influencing others. Facilitators can view communication differently, as a perspective from which all group activity can be understood. A group or organization is defined and shaped—in all its aspects—by communication.

Consequently . . .

**COMMUNICATION IS THE INESCAPABLE MEDIUM IN WHICH WE LIVE AND WORK.**

**WE MAKE OUR SOCIAL WORLDS IN AND THROUGH COMMUNICATION.**

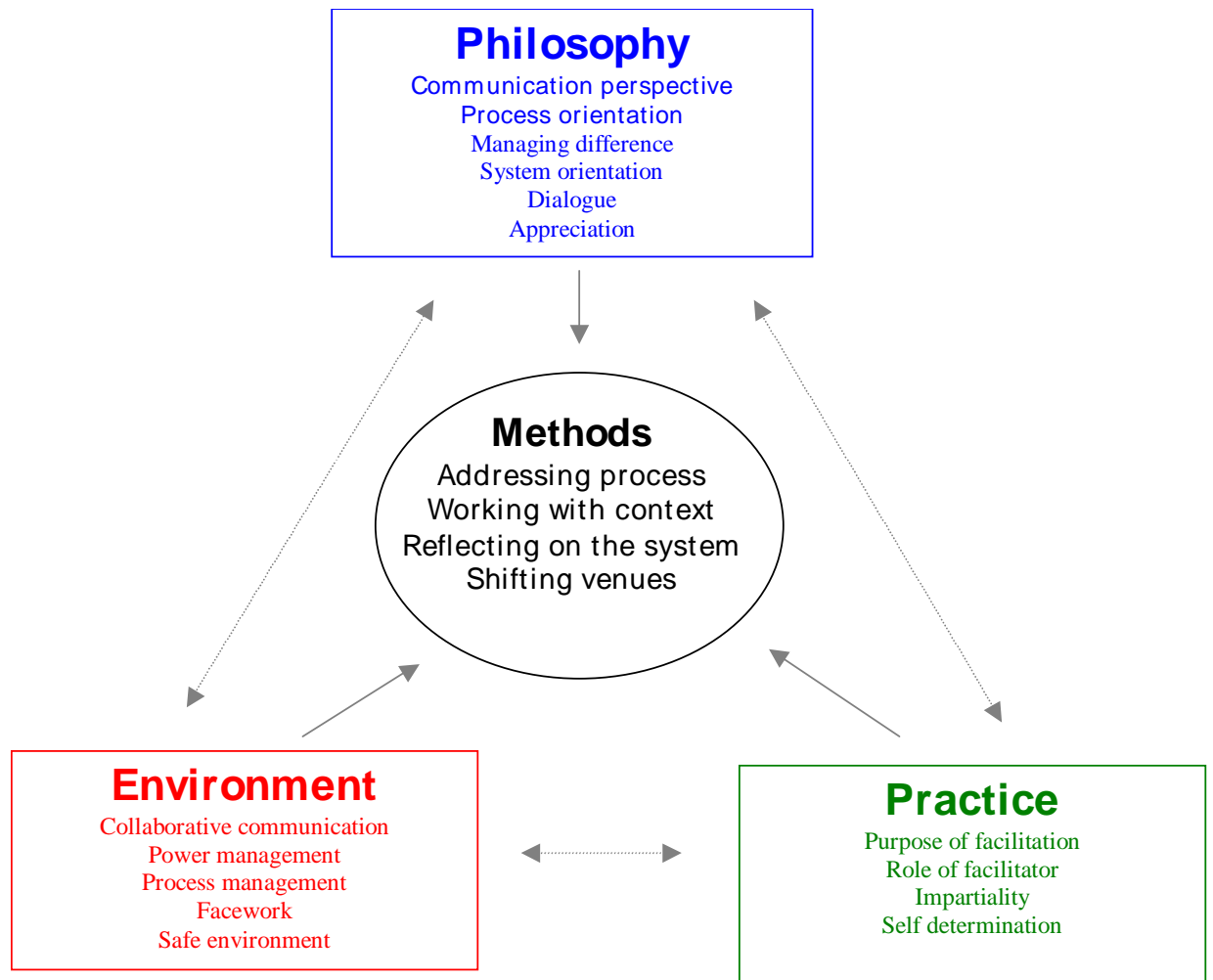
**THE QUALITY OF LIFE IS SHAPED BY THE PATTERNS OF COMMUNICATION WE USE.**

Facilitators encourage participants to explore new forms of communication and come to experience communication processes as significant in their own right. Participants will be rightfully concerned about the content of their talk, but they should come to see that the manner or process used to work through issues will shape the social world in which they live.

# The Facilitation System

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This model brings three aspects of facilitation together into a system. It is a good way to get an overview on each factor of facilitation.



## The Facilitation System

A Map Key

# What is Facilitation?

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A facilitator is a person who helps a group free itself from internal and external obstacles or difficulties so that the group may more efficiently and effectively pursue the achievement of the session's desired outcomes (Kayser, 1994). Facilitators clarify communication, prevent miscommunication and manage conflict. As a process manager, the facilitator is more concerned with process and group dynamics than content. Relieved of having to give content input, a facilitator does not impose judgment or give solutions to the group. To effectively manage the process, a facilitator needs to remember:

1. What is the goal or desired outcome of the session?
2. In what direction is the group actually heading? Is it toward the outlined goal or desired outcome?
3. Is there a difference between # 1 and 2 above?
4. If there is a difference, the facilitator may need to intervene to redirect the group toward the outlined goal or desired outcome.

To keep a group focused and directed on task, a facilitator can rely on tools such as ground rules, a clear agenda, and a safe environment.

Ground rules can be set by a design committee, the facilitator, or the group itself. The most effective ground rules usually focus on common courtesy and civility, such as "one person speaks at a time, no personal attacks, keep comments concise and brief."

Facilitators must ensure that there is a clear agenda. A clear agenda creates a common set of assumptions for all participants involved. Remember that group members come together with different sets of perceptions, ideas, beliefs, and values. It is important for a facilitator to display, discuss and refer to the agenda. Most sessions have an agenda for the day and a smaller "mini-agenda" for the session at hand.

A safe environment allows participants a place to freely share points-of-view, negotiate issues, and discuss options. Facilitators acknowledge the voices of participants, and serve to direct and redirect comments in the appropriate direction. People want to be heard and recognized. By having their opinions valued and respected, group members feel safe to explore options other than their fast-held positions, and enter into interest-based negotiating.

# What Facilitators Do

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- Help organize the group's work.
- Avoid telling group members what to say.
- Maintain impartiality.
- Let the group decide what it wants to accomplish, and help them get there.
- Help create a safe feeling in the group.
- Help clarify group goals.
- Assist in selecting participants.
- Help set groundrules and guidelines.
- Encourage members to be committed to the group.
- Help group members work together.
- Set up the room and equipment.
- Keep the discussion within the time limits.
- Guide the discussion.
- Ask helpful questions.
- Make sure everyone has a chance to participate.
- Help the members feel they are contributing.
- Provide focus.
- Manage behavior.
- Help participants communicate.
- Summarize what has been said.
- Keep notes.
- Provide encouragement.
- Manage disagreements.
- Help the group make progress.
- Keep the group's energy up.
- Stimulate creative thinking.
- Suggest useful processes to help the group make decisions.
- Help the group move toward agreement.
- Be a good listener and a clear speaker.

# Basic Principles of Facilitation

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There are many styles, models, and methods for facilitation. These many forms share five things:

1. Manage the process, not the content.
2. Remain impartial.
3. Help the group see itself.
4. Provide organization and structure.
5. Encourage commitment.

# Basic Facilitation Tasks

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## Before the meeting

1. Define your role and begin to build trust.
2. Gather information:
  - Group goals
  - Membership information
  - Organizational structure
  - Special problems and concerns
  - Physical space
3. Work with client to design process.
4. Establish a comfortable physical space.

## During the meeting

1. Clarify goals and purpose.
2. Establish roles and rules.
3. Verify and refine agenda.
4. Stay in touch with group's process needs.
5. Provide direction and organization as needed.

## After the meeting

1. Follow up as necessary.
  2. Help provide a transition to the next meeting.
  3. Prepare a report if required.
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# The MELD Model

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The word “meld” is a good way to remember what facilitators do.

Melding means merging or coming together, and that is just what facilitators help groups do—come together.

The word meld also helps us remember the main things that we do as facilitators:

## **M**obilizing resources

Helping the group work with its resources, including people, space, equipment, process, goals, time and others

## **E**mpowering participation

Helping each member feel respected and safe and able to contribute in their own ways.

## **L**istening and questioning

Tuning into each speaker’s ideas, perspectives, and feelings and maximizing productivity through good questions.

## **D**reaming and designing

Bringing out the group’s creativity and helping them direct their energy toward constructive problem solving and planning.

(from the Public Dialogue Consortium)



# Empowerment Challenge Model

People are *empowered* when they feel their ideas and concerns are taken seriously. In the ideal group, everyone is empowered and makes important contributions in their own ways. People do not feel empowered and do not participate constructively if they do not feel safe and respected.

- If you have a very active group that expresses a lot of agreement, your challenge is to organize and channel their energy toward a positive result.
- If you have a very active group that expresses a lot of disagreement, your challenge is to control the process and help build respect.
- If you have a passive group that seems to be in disagreement, your challenge is to build a feeling of safety and invite participation.
- If you have a passive group that seems to be in agreement, your challenge is to energize and stimulate them.

What makes us feel safe and respected in a group?

- We need to feel responsible and in control.
- We need to feel included and liked.
- We need to feel capable and listened to.

Here are some principles that help reach these goals:

- Stay neutral.
- Work to keep relationships from getting damaged.
- Help the group hear and respect others' ideas and concerns.
- Support the group in setting its own course and making its own decisions.
- Separate the people from the problem.

(from the Public Dialogue Consortium)

# Constructive Communication

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What kind of communication environment does a facilitator try to achieve. An ideal communication environment involves five characteristics:

1. **Collaborative Communication.** Enabling individuals to work together in ways that achieve mutually satisfactory results.
2. **Power Management.** Enabling every participant to make positive contributions and choices that help the group manage its complex tasks.
3. **Process Management.** Enabling groups to create workable processes for building effective work relationships and accomplishing its goals.
4. **Facework.** Enabling participants to communicate with one another in ways that respect the dignity and contribution of everyone.
5. **Safe Environment.** Enabling the group to discuss issues of concern without threat.

# Types of Public Engagement Events

	<i>PUBLIC EDUCATION</i>	<i>PUBLIC DELIBERATION</i>	<i>PUBLIC DIALOGUE</i>
<i>When is the Public involved?</i>	At the end of a process, after a decision has been made	After the issue has been framed but before a decision has been reached	Before the issue has been framed
<i>How are they involved?</i>	Marginally -- the public indicates their approval or disapproval of a preexisting decision	The public engages in "choice work" by deliberating the pros and cons of previously framed issues	The public and elected officials work together as full participants to frame, deliberate, and decide issues
<i>What abilities are required of the leader and of the public?</i>	Good persuasive abilities – the leader must convince the public about the soundness of the decision	The ability to frame the issue fairly and listen to the public	The ability to share power and information with citizens and act on the information generated from meetings
<i>What "gets made" in this form of decision making?</i>	At best, public compliance. At worst, an angry or apathetic public; cynicism; overworked elected officials	At best, the public knows that they have been heard. At worst, if their decision isn't implemented, they know that they haven't	At best, trust, respect and shared power among citizens and elected officials. At worst, a long and potentially expensive process

# Dialogical Questions

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Certain kinds of questions encourage participants to move from argument to dialogue.

Such questions . . .

- Invite the parties to speak only for themselves.  
*Ron, you have been referring a lot to what the doctors want. I wonder how your personal view might differ from other members of the medical staff on this issue. What personal experiences of yours might be different from those of the other members of the family?*
- Encourage parties to speak from personal experience.  
*Tim, what is it like to work in this office?*
- Encourage parties to speak directly to one another.  
*Joanne, what would you like to ask Robert about where he stands right now? Could you ask him directly? And Robert I'm hoping you might take a few moments to answer her question the best you can.*
- Invite a search for shared concerns.  
*People who disagree often have the same basic concerns. I want to take a few minutes to explore this possibility here. Could you each take a minute or two to talk about what you think your shared concerns might be?*
- Ask parties to reveal their uncertainties, gray areas, dilemmas, and doubts.  
*We have spent quite a bit of time exploring your feelings about this issue, and it is clear that you feel strongly about it. I don't want us to forget those feelings, but for the moment, I would like to shift gears a little and ask each of you to think about your uncertainties and gray areas, you know, your doubts. What aspects of this issue are not so clear for you?*
- Elicit parties' true curiosities, rather than posturings.  
*I would like to suggest a little session here that is sometimes helpful. I would like each of you to think about what the others have been saying and what you would like to ask them about. Here's what's different. We're going to have a rule that you can't ask questions to make a point, but you have to ask questions out of true curiosity, to really understand more about where the other person is coming from. What do you think? Would you like to give this a try?*
- Uncover complexities and help the parties become less polarized.  
*George, you have said that you are interested in keeping your full time job and working evenings and weekends to build your ceramics business. I wonder if you could talk a little more about how your week would go and what your schedule would look like with this plan.*
- Elicit creative thinking rather than standard arguments.  
*Margaret, you have been really clear about the reasons you want a private office. I wonder if you have a few ideas about how the office as a whole might be arranged.*

# Dialogue Formats

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There are many formats for dialogue. Here are a few of these:

## **Emergent-Design Model**

A community organization holds a series of focus groups or establishes a design team to explore an issue and frame various ways in which it might be discussed. A unique series of dialogue meetings is designed based on the outcomes of the focus groups. The Public Dialogue Consortium is a leader in using this model.

## **Public Conversations Model**

This model consists of a series of private dialogues to explore personal feelings, ideas, and perspectives on a controversial issue. Representatives with opposing points of view are included, and the session is highly structured and facilitated to assure a safe environment and prevent destructive debate. The leader in this method is the Public Conversations Project.

## **Study Circles Model**

In a series of meetings, participants deliberate about an already-framed issue. Sessions follow a standard format. Educational materials are distributed in advance, and the discussions focus on policy options and community action. Leaders in this model are the National Issues Forums and the Study Circle Resource Center.

## **Vision-to-Action Model**

Vision to action workshops offer a flexible approach for communities in large and small group formats to explore concerns, visions, and actions. Accomplished in a single- or multiple-session design, these events invite participants to move from a discussion of concerns to visions and then to create action plans. A leader in this model is the Public Dialogue Consortium.

# CVA Model

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C-V-A stands for Concerns, Visions, and Actions. The CVA model is an excellent way to help a group achieve positive, constructive goals.

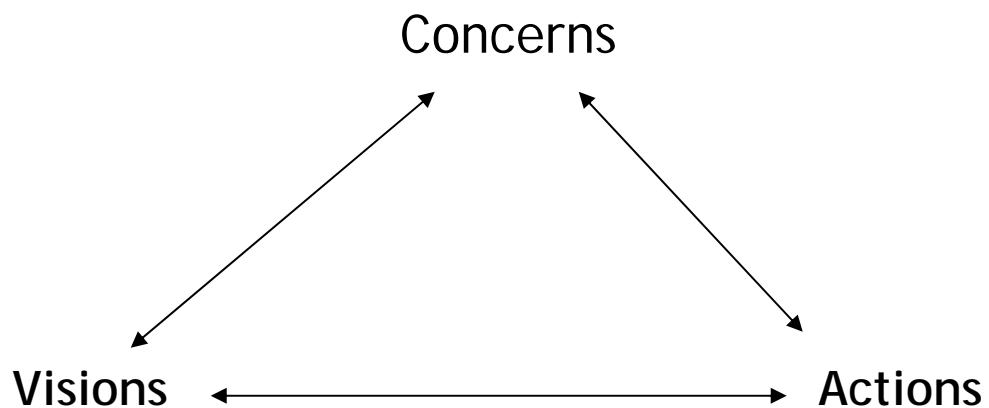
**CONCERNS** are problems or difficulties that various group members are worried about.

**VISIONS** are ideas about the ideal state, what things should be like.

**ACTIONS** are concrete suggestions about how the concerns could be solved and the vision accomplished.

You can start a CVA discussion with any of these points—with concerns, visions, or actions. The important thing is always to move from one to another. For example, you might have the group discuss each of the following questions in turn:

- What are your concerns?
- If these concerns were solved, what would things be like?
- What practical steps could we take to achieve this vision?



# Issue Framing

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Issue framing is a process of defining and clarifying important concerns, points of difference, and choices. Groups begin with a fuzzy problem, develop a more precise wording of the question or questions, and develop realistic options.

Here are possible steps for issue framing:

1. Select an issue that is a shared concern of a large segment of the group. In initial discussions, explore what is important to the group. What matters to many people? Do not worry that participants disagree about this question. The hottest issues are indications of deep concerns.
2. Word the issue as a neutral question. State the issue as an open question with several possible answers. Do not embed a solution in the question. The following are unacceptably biased questions:  
*Why should George do the inventory?*  
*How can I get Harriet to take over the inventory?*  
  
A better question is:  
*How should the inventory be handled?*
3. Word the question such that more than two options are possible. Avoid polarized questions. Leave open several possible choices for answering the question. The following question is not adequate because it is polarized:  
*Should George or Harriet do the inventory?*
4. Find a wording that everyone can live with. Work within the language of the group. Find a wording that feels comfortable to everyone. The question will probably look something like the following:  
*How can we get the inventory done efficiently, accurately, and fairly?*

# Deliberating

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In problem solving and planning sessions, the group will frame its goals, issues, problems, or questions; generate options; and then make decisions. Part of any good decision-making process is deliberation, or careful consideration of options.

Once the options are outlined, deliberation begins. In a deliberation session, each choice is discussed systematically. The facilitator guides the group through an examination of the pros and cons of each choice, the values underlying the various choices, and the trade-offs involved in each.

Often groups discuss the points as they come to mind, often skipping back and forth from one to another. This is fine as long as the group continues to weigh the options carefully. If you find, however, that the discussion is getting disorganized and that the group is not staying focused, then you may need to suggest that the options be discussed one at a time.

The facilitator can help the group improve its deliberation by asking good questions. Here are some examples:

*What would this choice mean for how you did your job?*

*What criteria are you using when you say you favor this action?*

*What would be the consequences of this policy for the whole group?*

*What would those who oppose this choice say?*

*What about the proposed option can you just not live with?*

*Is there anything you cannot live without? Why?*

One technique for encouraging efficient and careful deliberation is the “**YNI**” **Method**. Here you divide a flip chart into four columns. The options are written in the left column. The second column is the **YES** column, the third is the **NO** column, and the fourth is the **INTERESTING** column. You ask everyone to “vote” on each option: (1) Yes, I want it. (2) No I do not want it. (3) I don’t know, but it is interesting. Keep track with tick marks.

Ideas that few or no one wants can be eliminated. Ideas that most or all want can be tentatively retained. Ideas that are mixed should be discussed more. Ideas that many members of the group find interesting may lead to the most fruitful discussion of all.



# Cultural Issues

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What is culture and why does it matter? Culture is a system of beliefs, values, and practices common to a large group of people that are learned and perpetuated over time. There are many types of culture: Ethnic, gender, national, language-using groups, regional groups, vocational groups, etc.

Although no one in our society is a member of just one culture, a certain culture may come to have special significance in a person's life. Our cultures are important to us.

How we communicate is determined in part by cultural patterns. For example:

Some cultures value verbal communication, and others place more value on nonverbal forms.

Some cultures are more formal, and others informal.

Some cultures speak directly to the point, and others tend to be indirect.

Some cultures feel the need to fill moments with talk, while others value silence.

Some cultures prefer calmness, while others show they care by emotional and loud expression.

How we define and manage conflict is also determined in part by cultural patterns. Here are a few cultural differences in how conflict is handled:

Confrontation vs. harmony  
Power/authority vs. collaboration  
Intermediary vs. direct involvement  
Individual negotiation vs. group consensus  
Direct vs. indirect discussion

How, then, do we manage cultural differences? Facilitators cannot learn every culture and adapt to every cultural form. Being overly "cultural" can lead you to stereotype. So . . .

- Expect differences.
- Do not assume understanding.
- Listen carefully.
- Seek ways of having parties reflect one another's understandings.
- Be patient, humble, and willing to learn.
- Ask what participants need.
- Look for ways of meeting parties' deep cultural interests.
- Be flexible.

# Flipcharts

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Facilitators often need to keep track of a group's comments and ideas in a way that will be helpful to members as they work. The flipchart is commonly used for this purpose. You can tear off the sheets and hang them on the wall for constant reference.

Here are some guidelines:

- Find the best place to set the flipchart so everyone can see it.
- Use several flipcharts as needed.
- Don't spend the whole time with your back to the group.
- Write in key words that capture the thought.
- Write clearly and organize the material on the chart in a logical way that is easy to read.
- Feel free to use a creative format as long as the group can easily follow what you are doing.
- Use different colors if you have them.
- Don't write too large or too small.
- Have fun with your flip charts!

High quality digital cameras provide a flipchart enhancement that can be very effective. Your flipcharts can be photographed and either emailed to participants or printed and distributed to them.

# Time Management

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How can you keep people on track, help them share speaking time, make sure the group gets the job done, and finish on time?

- Generate an agenda and remind people of what they have covered and what is left to do.
- Give regular time reminders.
- Remind the group of the time limit and the need to keep comments brief.
- If participants seem to be getting off track, ask them if that is how they want to use their limited time.
- If you have to cut someone off, do it in a nice way. Acknowledge contributions before cutting someone off.

Comments like the following are gracious ways of controlling group discussion:

*Thanks, Jim, I can see you are really concerned about the lack of a community center in your town. Let's hold that thought, but we need to hear from some of the others now.*

*We're falling a little behind time now. Let's keep our comments just a bit briefer.*

*I appreciate your creativity, Sally. Let's get back to some of your ideas later, but for now, I want to hear the ideas of some of the rest of you.*

*These points are very helpful, and I want to make sure we incorporate them, but I think we need to get back to the agenda or we won't get through everything in time.*

*I notice that we only have an hour left and there's a lot of energy here for creative brainstorming. Is this how you want to use your time right now?*

*Thanks for your creativity, everyone. We only have thirty minutes left. What can we do now to make sure we get the job done by the end of this meeting?*

# Managing Difficult Behavior

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Here are some strategies for helping to transform negative behavior into a more positive pattern:

**Interruptions** ~ Acknowledge the person's need to talk.

*I can see you have strong feelings on this, Bob, and we'll get to you in just a moment. In the meantime, I want to hear the rest of Jane's comment.*

**Non-participation** ~ Acknowledge listening and invite comment.

*Jim, I see you have been listening for a while, and I wonder what you are thinking about all of this.*

**Disruptive behavior** ~ Address it as a group problem.

*I notice we've been losing time by repeating things after people arrive. I wonder how we can make more efficient use of our time in this regard.*

**Side Conversations** ~ Talk to the offending individuals privately.

*Betty, I've been distracted by your whispering in the back row. I'm sure it's nothing, but I just wanted to check with you to see if there is something I should know.*

**Offensive statements** ~ Let the group handle them.

*(A group member makes a racial slur. Pause for a moment to let it sink in, see if anyone comments, then move on. If the problem persists, ask the group if they would like a ground rule on respectful language.)*

**Hostility toward others** ~ Reframe it and remind the group of the ground rules.

*[upon hearing one participant call another a thief] I want to remind you about the groundrule of maintaining respectful language. We have to work together, so let's make it as easy as possible.*

**Loud, emotional argument** ~ Interrupt, acknowledge, summarize, and take a break.

*Just a minute, just a minute. Excuse me. I can see that Tom is very upset about Elizabeth's new accounting system, and Elizabeth you don't appreciate Tom's argument about it. I can see that both of you care about how records are kept, and I want to suggest that we look at that issue calmly. Let's take a break and get back to this situation when we get back*

**Gripping and whining** ~ Acknowledge the caring, state the positive vision behind the person's complaint, and ask for a solution

*I see you really care about making improvements here. I appreciate your vision for a really effective working environment, and I'm wondering what ideas you have for improving the situation.*