

Tools for Meetings and Workshops

Includes Tools for:

Introductions and Starting Meetings
Building Trust
Tackling Issues

Encouraging Participation
Resolving Conflict
Energisers and Games
Evaluating

This is a compilation of tools that we have found useful when working in groups. Often it is best to have someone facilitate these exercises and to set some groundrules together with the group, such as 'No-interrupting' and 'Stick to time'. Some general points to bear in mind:

- ★ Every group is different. Some tools may not be appropriate in a specific group or situation. Don't force a tool on a group or an individual, do let people decide for themselves to what extent they want to participate.
- ★ Be flexible. Don't let the process dominate the spirit of the group, but allow tools to evolve organically with the group. Be creative and invent your own tools.
- ★ Make use of visual aids such as blackboards. Use them to write down instructions, questions to consider and to record responses from the participants.
- ★ Be aware that people might not be happy to share with the whole group everything that was said in a pair/small group.
- ★ Do explain the purpose of a tool before asking the group to use it. That way people feel in control of what they are doing, allowing them to participate more fully.

Tools for Introductions and Starting Meetings

These tools help people get acquainted with each other and are best used at the beginning of a meeting. Check out the web for more ideas, for example:
www.wilderdom.com/games/gamespecific.html

Personal Introductions: Each person gives their name, where they are from and one other fact about themselves. This third fact could be freely chosen by each individual or the facilitator could suggest a theme (e.g. What kind of food they like, why they are at the meeting, something good that happened in the last week).



Pair Introductions: Ask people to pair up with people they don't know or know less well. One person interviews the other for three minutes, then roles are swapped. Questions can include the reasons why the person is there and what they are hoping to learn/achieve during the meeting/workshop. When the whole group re-forms the pairs introduce each other, giving as much detail as they can remember. The facilitator could also suggest specific themes to be included in the interview.

Name Games: There are countless games that help people remember everyone else's name. Here's one of our favourites: The group stands in a circle facing each other. Everyone needs to think of a verb (action word) that begins with the same letter as their name. Have an initial go-round where everyone says what their name is (e.g. jumping James). When everyone has said what they're called, start off by throwing a (real or imaginary) ball to someone while saying their name and acting out the verb (so you throw a ball to Jumping James, and Jump while you say his name). James then throws the ball to the next person, while saying and acting out their name (Laughing Lindsay)...

Cocktail Party: Ask people to image that they are at a cocktail party and get them to mill around, meet each other, shake hands and chat. You can change the scene after a bit to a nightclub, on the beach, etc.

People Map: Create a human map to show where people consider their home. Indicate North, East, South & West, and allow participants to position themselves to create a map. Ask people furthest away where they are from. Proceed to each cluster of people. People can also reposition themselves. You could vary this by asking where people would like to live/go on holiday etc.

Excitement Sharing: People share something exciting that has happened to them recently. Examples are: *'I've harvested the first peas of the year'*, *'My friend from New Zealand came to visit'*, *'I've got a new job'*. This creates a lot of positive energy for the meeting and puts people more in touch with each other's lives. You can use this instead of introductions when people already know each other. Make sure people keep it brief. Discourage comments or questions. Don't confuse excitement sharing with announcements.

Feeling Sharing: Ask people to listen inwards and to consider how they feel. Then have a round with people describing in a couple of sentences how they feel, for example curious, nervous, tired, excited. This allows the facilitator and the group to tune into each other. If people are tired have an energiser and open the windows. A variation is to ask people to visualise a plant that relates to how they feel and to share this with the group.

Getting Present: Sit in a circle so that everyone can see and hear each other. Ask people to share in turn bothers, distractions and events that are on their mind. For example: "I'm giving a presentation this afternoon and I feel nervous." "My daughter had a baby last night. It's my first grandchild." Ask everyone to give their full attention to the speaker. As facilitator you can help people if they appear stuck. Interventions could include: "Is there any action you want to take?" "Is there anything else you want to say about that?"

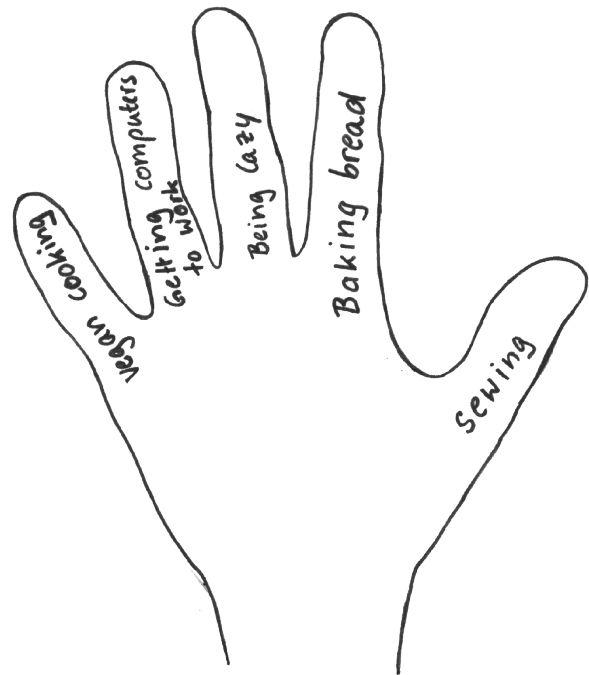
This tool is suitable for groups that work together closely and where there is a high level of trust.

Tools for Building Trust

These exercises help build trust in a group by sharing personal details and feelings with each other.

Skilled Hand Exercise: Hand out paper and pens. Ask everyone to draw around their hands and to write something they do well into each of the fingers. Split into pairs. Take turns discussing things you do well and how you acquired those skills. This exercise not only helps people find out more about each other, but also develops people's confidence.

Picture Yourself: Hand out coloured paper and coloured pens. Ask people to draw/paint a picture that expresses who they are. When everyone has finished ask people to pair up and explain their pictures to their partners. The partners then introduce each other to the group using the picture.



Alternative CV: Hand out coloured sheets of paper and coloured pens. Ask people to draw a pattern of their choice on their piece of paper. When everyone has finished ask people to fill the pattern with words or phrases describing what they like about themselves, skills they have and skills they would like to have. Ask people to write their name on this. Pass around the finished patterns for everyone to look at or hang them up on the wall. This exercise helps people to appreciate themselves and others for who they are, laying a good foundation for working together.

A Journey of Discovery: Go outside into a garden or woodland. Form into pairs. One person closes their eyes, the other guides that person by the hand and takes them to discover natural objects with all their senses apart from sight. Swap roles after a set time. Participants need to be very careful not to abuse the trust placed in them by their partners. It is very pleasant to touch and smell a flower, but not a thistle! This can be quite a lot of fun especially after or in the middle of a long, tiring session.

Mirroring: Split into pairs standing opposite each other. One person makes movements, the other tries to mirror them as well as they can. Swap roles. When both have played both roles, they can try to coordinate movements with each other, so that both become player and mirror at the same time. This works best with slow movements and needs a lot of concentration. Try not to talk while playing.

Tools for Tackling Issues

Brainstorms are a tool for sparking creative thinking and help to quickly gather a large number of ideas. Begin with stating the issue to be brainstormed. Ask people to call out all their ideas as fast as possible - without censoring it. The crazier the ideas the better. This helps people to be inspired by each other. Have one or two note takers to write all ideas down where everyone can see them. Make sure there is no discussion or comment on others' ideas. Structured thinking and organising can come afterwards.

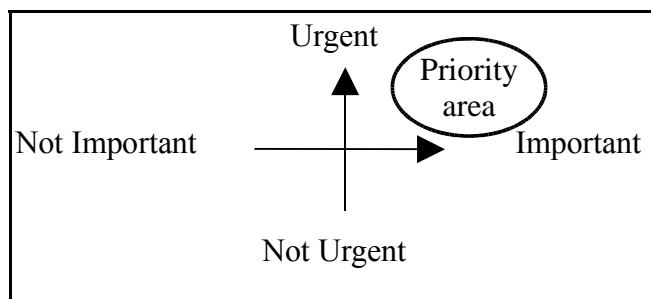


Pros & Cons: Got several ideas and can't decide which one to go for? Simply list the benefits and drawbacks of each idea and compare the results. This can be done as a full group, or by asking pairs, or small groups to work on the pros and cons of one option and report back to the group.

Spectrum Lines: They help to explore and visually rank the different views on an issue within the group. Start by creating an imaginary or real line through the room (chalk or masking tape are good for indoor spaces). One end stands for “I agree completely”, the other end for “I disagree completely”. Outline the issue under debate and formulate it into a statement to agree or disagree with. Ask people to position themselves along the line according to their views. They may try out several spots before making a final choice. Ask them to have a short conversation with the person next to them, explaining why they are where they are. Then invite participants to share their viewpoints and feelings with the group. Repeat this exercise with other statements that explore the issue under discussion and see whether and how people’s viewpoints change. You could also use a curved line so that people can see each other. This exercise taps into both our intuitive and rational sides and needs to be done quietly and thoughtfully. A Spectrum Line may require strong facilitation to stop the group from slipping into general discussion.

Urgent/Important Grid:

A classic time-management tool that can be applied to group prioritisation! You can use this tool on paper, or as a ‘Spectrum Line’ (see above). The group can rank ideas according to their urgency and importance:



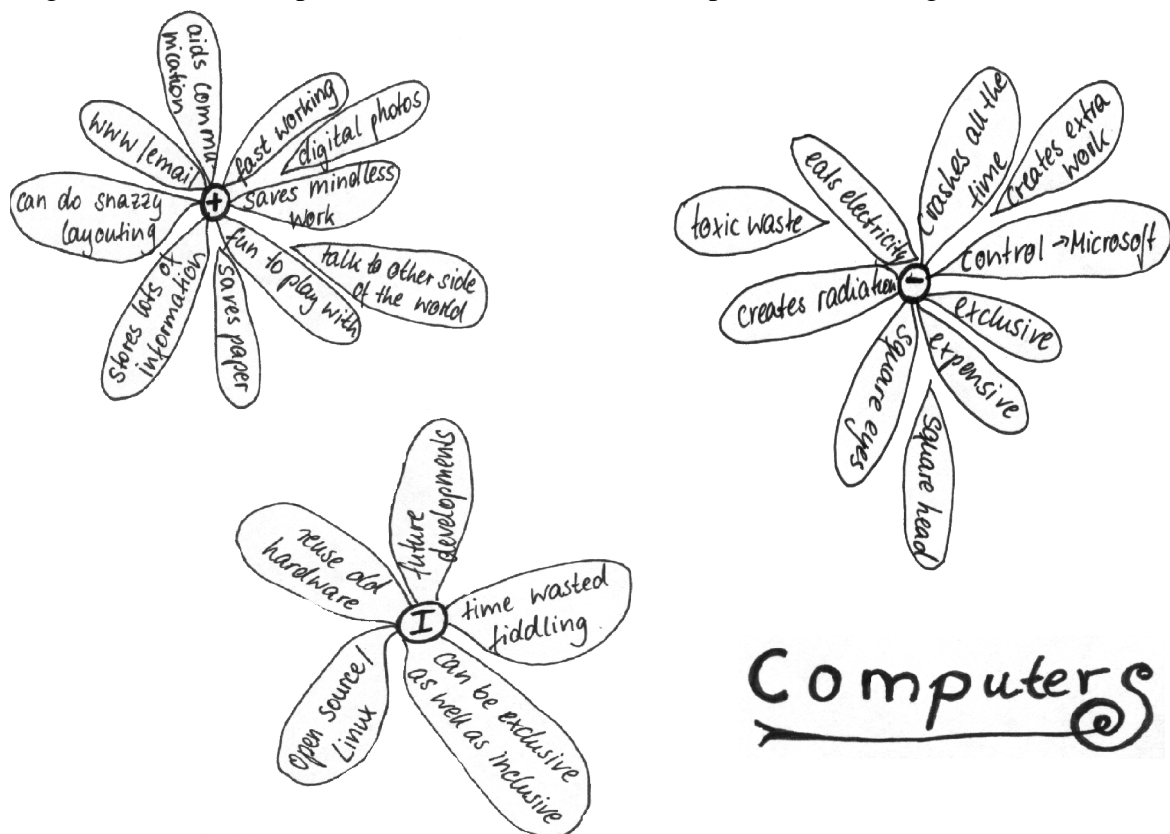
To use as a Spectrum, divide up the room into 4 quarters. Get the group to imagine the axes (marking these out with chalk or tape on the floor will help). Label the axes ‘Urgent’, ‘Important’, etc. as in the diagram and ask people to stand where they feel appropriate for the first option, then the second etc. Your priority should be the things that most people feel are both “urgent” and “important”.

Clearing Out: Agree on a topic (“Things that make us angry”, “Destruction of the Earth” etc.) Ask everyone to write down things that come into mind onto a large piece of paper. Give the group the chance to look at all that has been written down, then get everyone to tear up the

sheet of paper and to drop it into the bin or the fire bit by bit. It's very liberating after an analysis of the depressing state of the world and before brainstorming actions that we can take, as it helps us to overcome the feeling of being helpless. It's also great fun.

Mapping: Use large writing where everyone can see it. Arrange key words in groups or out on their own. Use connecting arrows, colours and pictures. This is a lot more organic and fun than a simple list. It can allow people to make new connections. The writing could be done by one person or everyone in the group.

Plus-Minus-Interesting (PMI) is a process that allows the expression of opposing views without generating too much conflict. This tool can be used in the whole group, in small groups or individually. Write the topic across the top of a large sheet of paper. Draw a plus sign, a minus sign and an "I" (which stands for Interesting). Start with the plus and ask people to list anything that they feel to be positive about the topic. Write these without comment around the plus sign. When everyone has had their say move on to the minus sign and list everything that people feel to be more negative. Around the "I" sign list everything that people find interesting, ideas that could be explored further etc. Then move back to the plus sign and start a second round. The first round finds out what's happening with the group. The second round builds upon it. One particular issue can come up in every section as people might have different opinions. Issues can have both a positive and a negative side!



Hassle Lines: are a form of quick role plays. They are great for getting people to explore their emotional responses to a situation, to look at body language or to prepare for a particular situation such as aggression from the public or the police during an action.

Participants form two lines, each facing a partner. The two lines are given roles and a brief scenario and then step towards each other and play their roles. The left row for example may

take on the role of protesters, the other side of unsympathetic passers-by, making a provocative comment such as “get a job, you dirty hippy”.

After a short time (thirty seconds to two minutes) the facilitator stops the role play and asks a few people for their comments, e.g. how it worked and how it made them feel. Roles can then be swapped and scenarios varied.

Role Plays: In this form of improvised drama players take on roles in a given scenario as preparation for a real life situation or to evaluate a past experience. Role plays also help to understand people's reactions, and give insights into the thoughts and feelings of “opponents”. Select a situation to be played out. Ask yourself what you want to examine and why. A simple situation is best. Explain the situation carefully, including the groups represented and the physical layout. A role play is used to learn what to do in a situation *or* to study a particular role and reaction. Define one of them but not both as that would restrict spontaneity.

Ask people to volunteer for roles that they do not identify with strongly. Give them a few minutes to get into their roles. Ask everyone who is not playing to be active observers.

The facilitator stops the role play when enough issues have been uncovered, the play comes to a natural end or people want to stop. The play should also be stopped if a player shows great tension / gets too involved. Have a short break and then evaluate the role play.

Evaluation gives players and observers the chance to assimilate and analyse what has happened. Start by asking the players how they felt in their roles. Ask observers for their impressions and then allow discussion. What have people learnt and how they will apply their insights in real life? Discourage comments that tell players what they *should* have done. Compliment people for acting boldly in difficult situations regardless of the outcome. Role plays are there for learning. Use encouraging language such as “Another option that you might try is...”, “Perhaps this would work...”, “I learned ... from your tactic and would like to try...”. Evaluation should not go on too long. If new insights come up the group might want to try them out in a new role play rather than talk about what might happen.

Reverse Role Plays allow people understand both sides of a conflict. They can help people entrenched in one position to think more flexibly. They are useful for examining a critical incident that occurs repeatedly or is expected to occur and for developing a definition of acceptable behaviour (e.g. conflicts over power, sexism, ageism etc.).

Set up a situation involving two sides. At an important point in the role play, have everyone freeze. Ask people to take the opposite role and take up the conversation where it left off. The facilitator may have to help people remember what the last lines of the dialogue were. It can help if the facilitator physically moves people to their new positions and says “You are now X, and you are now Y”. Give people a moment to mentally shift to their new identities and resume the role play. Follow the role play with an evaluation.

Tools for Encouraging Participation

Hand Signals: A simple technique that can make meetings and workshops run more smoothly and also help the facilitator see emerging agreements and common ground. Three simple signals should suffice:

★ **Raise a forefinger** when you wish to contribute to the discussion with a general point.

★ **Raise both forefingers** if your point is directly relevant to the current discussion. This allows you to jump to the head of the queue, in front of all those people raising just one finger. Use wisely and discourage overuse!

★ **'Silent applause'** – when you hear an opinion that you agree with, wave a hand with your fingers pointing upwards (also called 'twinkling'). This saves a lot of time as people don't need to chip in to say “I'd just like to add that I agree with...”

Keeping a Speakers List: A tool which involves asking people to raise a finger (see *Hands signals*) when they wish to speak, and noting them down in order. They are then invited to speak in that order. The group will soon become impatient with people that ignore this protocol and just barge in and interrupt.

Active Agreement: is a useful groundrule for every meeting or workshop. It asks everyone to take an active part in making decisions. When the group is asked a question or has to make a decision, insist on active agreement. Too many bad decisions are made because people stare at their feet rather than clearly agree or disagree. Later on those same people may feel that the decision was not one they supported, leading to tension in the group. By insisting on active (dis)agreement this can be avoided and decisions that represent the views of all can be reached. Silent applause, or lack of it, (see *Hand signals*) can be a useful way of showing active agreement.



The Parking Lot makes sure all ideas get recorded and participants don't feel like they've been ignored. Whenever anything comes up that's not relevant to the discussion at hand “park” it in the Parking Lot (a large sheet of paper on the wall). In other words write it up on the paper and deal with it later. This allows you to stay focussed but reassures participants they will be heard. Of course if you want to avoid people feeling ignored, make sure you do deal with parked items! Consider having a space reserved on the agenda to deal with parked items.

Go-rounds: Everyone takes a turn to speak on a subject without interruption or comment from other people. Go-rounds are useful for equalising participation and giving everyone some clear space to express their opinion. Allowing people to “pass” means that quieter people don't feel put on the spot. To keep it focussed clearly state what the purpose of the Go-round is and write the question on a flipchart where everyone can see it. You can set time limits as necessary.

Working in Small Groups: There are many reasons why you may want to split into smaller groups:

★ Large groups can sometimes become dominated by a few people or ideas, stifling creativity and the contributions of others.

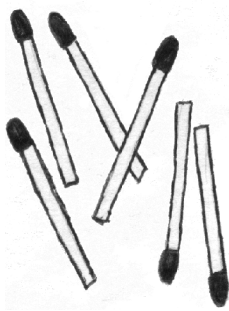
★ It can be difficult to discuss emotionally charged issues in a large group.

★ Effectiveness: many topics are discussed more effectively in a smaller focus group - for example the details of laying out a newsletter .

★ Smaller groups allow time for everyone to speak and to feel involved. They are a lot less intimidating too.

Think about the sort of group you need - a random split (e.g. numbering off or by eye/hair colour etc.) or specific interest groups? Explain clearly what you want groups to do. Write specific questions / topics on large paper / a blackboard beforehand and give them to each group. If you are going to have feedback at the end, you need to say clearly what they need to feedback.

Talking Sticks: You can use a stick or a conch shell or almost any other distinctive object. Place the talking stick in the centre of the group. Speakers take it from the centre, say their piece and return it to the middle. Only the person holding the talking stick is permitted to speak (you can set a time limit if necessary). This tool allows people to consider and take their time in voicing their views as they don't have to be afraid that some one else might jump in. It also makes people conscious of when they interrupt others and helps them to break the habit.



Matchstick Discussion: This can be used to place limits on dominant or over-eager speakers. It also encourages shy speakers to contribute. Each person is given the same number of matches (one to five matches depending on time available.) Every time someone speaks s/he gives up a match. When someone has used all their matches they may not speak again until everyone else's matches are gone too. Decide beforehand whether people may give their matches to other members of the group.

Cross Exercise: Draw a cross in the middle of the room with some chalk. This cross symbolises the proposal. Everyone positions themselves in the room - depending on how strongly they identify with the proposal closer to or further away from the cross. This exercise can also be used to find out how strongly people identify with the group.

Think and Listen in Pairs: This tool creates a space where everyone is heard, enabling participants to explore and formulate their own thoughts/feelings on an issue without interruption. It can help in uncovering and resolving conflict as well as allowing people to gather and consolidate their thoughts before a group discussion. Listening in pairs is also a good way of developing skills in active listening.

Split into pairs, one person is the listener, the other the thinker. The thinker speaks about her thoughts/feelings on the issue. S/he may also be quiet or laugh. Encourage the thinker to speak first thoughts - that is to speak as thoughts enter the mind without analysing or holding back. This may seem difficult at first - think of it as holding an internal monologue, but out loud. The role of the listener is to give full attention to the thinker without interrupting, questioning or commenting. The listener can provide an attentive and supportive atmosphere through eye contact, body language, encouraging noises, smiles and nods. If the thinker gets stuck the listener may ask neutral questions such as "How does that make you feel? Why do you think that?" After a set time (3-5 minutes is usually plenty of time) thinker and listener swap roles.

This exercise can be followed by a go-round in the full group, with every participant summarising her/his thoughts or summarising those of their partner.

Tools for Resolving Conflict

Here are some tools that are useful in uncovering and resolving conflict within the group. Conflict resolution tools generally benefit from strong facilitation. Lay down clear rules and don't let discussions get out of hand. Do not feel afraid to stop the process if necessary.



Mediation: Where two people have fallen out badly, one to one mediation may be necessary. Sometimes it is sufficient to have a single mediator; but if the whole group can be present to hear what is said, it can demonstrate a lot more support for both parties. The exact process will depend on sensitivity to the particular circumstances, but you could try the following: Ask both parties to speak uninterrupted for as long as they like to give their perspective on the situation, using “I feel...” statements. Then clarify any disagreements or facts, where possible. The mediator(s) can then put questions to one or the other of the disputants, to see if there are any points of consensus. Finally if the atmosphere is relaxed enough, participants can talk directly with each other, with the mediator(s) ready to slow down things again if necessary.

Controlled Dialogue: This tool is helpful when two people find it difficult to listen to each other and understand each other's concerns. Form a group of three, one observer and two speakers/listeners. There are three phases to this form of dialogue, each given a set amount of time:

1. The listener repeats word for word what the speaker has said. Only then is s/he allowed to answer.
2. The listener summarises what the speaker has said and then answers.
3. When answering the listener addresses all issues and concerns of the speaker.

The observer makes sure participants stick to the format and helps out if necessary. Particularly in the first and second phase the speaker should concentrate on essential points as listening requires a lot of concentration. You can also use this exercise to practise listening and responding skills in the group.

Sharing Withholds: Withholds are thoughts that we keep to ourselves. They usually have to do with judgements about ourselves, others, or what is happening in the group. There needs to be a climate of generous listening, before sharing withholds is possible. Set up an unstructured round asking people to make statements beginning with: “If I could change one thing in the group it would be...”, “What upsets me about this group is ...” Do not allow anyone to respond to the withholds or start a discussion. Make sure that everyone has a say - it is highly unlikely that someone is completely happy with a group. At the end of the round, see if any themes have emerged and if anyone wants their issue discussed. This exercise takes about 30 minutes depending on size of the group.

Feelings Meeting: Similar to *Sharing Withholds*. A meeting which is solely concerned with feelings. Participants do not have to deal with decisions and actions. Such meetings allow the group to involve and support members as whole people and to resolve concerns, problems and conflicts before they become too serious. It helps to use tools such as talking sticks or go-rounds to encourage active listening. Encourage people to use “I...” statements instead of speaking for other people too. Begin by asking people about where they are at in their lives outside the group, giving everyone a context for their reactions within the group. Listen for what is not being said. Some people/groups find it hard to admit to negative feelings and tiptoe around conflicts. Create a safe enough space so that people feel able to open up.

Energisers and Games

When people stop concentrating or become irritable in a meeting, this could simply be because they've been sitting and listening for too long. A stretch or a game, can re-energise people. Games also help people to get to know each other better and lift the spirits in the group. Be sensitive to the group and individual members - the idea is to relax people, not to make them feel embarrassed or isolated. Don't coerce people into playing games. If people don't feel like playing, they could get themselves a cup of tea or go to the loo. Also remember mobility issues. Sometimes a simple break or a stretch works just as well.

Rain: A facilitator talks the group through this energiser. Get everyone to stand up. Start tapping your head lightly with your fingers imagining soft rain. Let it slowly get heavier the further you move your hands down your body. Let the rain turn into a thunderstorm on your calves. Clap them hard with your hands. Then move your hands back up your body, ending with soft rain on your head.

Waking up in the Jungle: People think of their favourite animal and its noise, and at a signal pretend that they are that animal waking up. As the animals wake up they stretch, move and get louder and louder. A good quick game for sleepy groups.

Green Trousers Game: Form a circle and take one seat away. One person stands in the middle and calls out something like "Everyone with green trousers". Everyone with green trousers then jumps up and runs to a seat vacated by someone else. The person left without a seat remains in the middle to call out something else.

Knot Game: Stand in a circle, close your eyes. Walk towards the centre of the circle with outstretched hands. Find another hand for each of yours. Then open your eyes. Unravel the knot without opening hands. Involves getting physically close to others, stretching, laughing and problem solving. Works best in groups of 10-20 people. Form two knots if necessary.

Pair Tag: In pairs, one is the chaser. With a big group, this allows for lots of hiding behind others - fun and active. Swap partners after a bit.

Animal Sounds: Participants are blindfolded and assigned an animal. The challenge is to use animal noises in order to meet up with other animals of same species. Aim to have at least three animals of each species. Releases energy. Loud, fun, chaotic, then gradually order and unity.

Tools for Evaluating Meetings and Workshops



List the expectations that were gathered at the beginning of the meeting. To what extent were they satisfied or changed as the event progressed? Do the same with goals.



Use the Plus-Minus-Interesting format individually or in small groups. Report back to the whole group. Discuss solutions to problems and their implementation.



Ask everyone to list two or three high and low points of the event.



★ Evaluation allows us to learn from our experiences. It should be a regular part of our meetings and workshops as it gives us the chance for honest feedback on the process and content of the event, allowing us to improve in the future.



Draw up a questionnaire and distribute it amongst the participants for filling in.



Have a round where everyone sums up their feelings or ask everyone to write down comments on a large piece of paper.

★ Everyone who participated in an event should be encouraged to take part in its evaluation. Bear in mind that there will be differences of opinion and that it is not necessary for the group to come to agreement on the matter.

★ It is important to point out what was successful as well as what could have gone better. Begin with positive evaluations wherever possible.

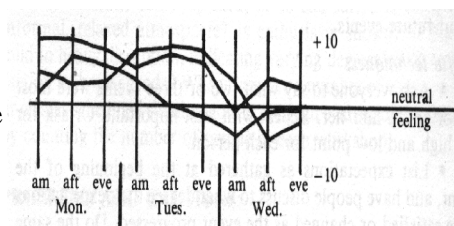
★ The structure of the evaluation should be planned carefully - how will you draw out what type of information? Keep evaluations of the process and of the content of the events separate.

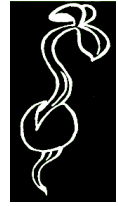


Ask "What are you taking away from this session?" This rapid review can help people notice what they have learned.



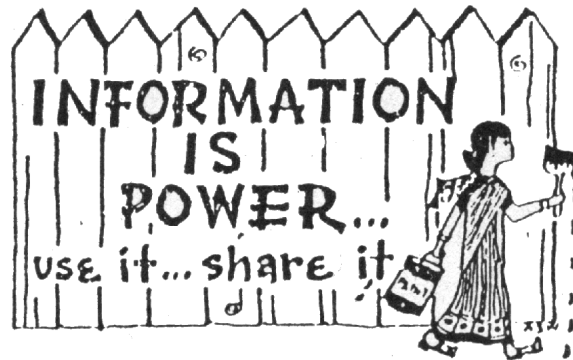
Use a graph on a large piece of paper representing the entire meeting/event. Each participant, using a different coloured crayon or chalk, draws a line from one end to the other, drawing it above or below a central line depending on how much s/he has enjoyed/gained from the session. The phrasing of the question is important.





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