

Facilitating  
meaningful  
and productive  
conversations



REGIONAL  
INNOVATOR'S  
NETWORK

# Group dynamics

Have you heard of Bruce Tuckman's classic naming of the stages of group development: forming, storming, norming, performing?

When people enter a group situation, they're often not ready to begin work together

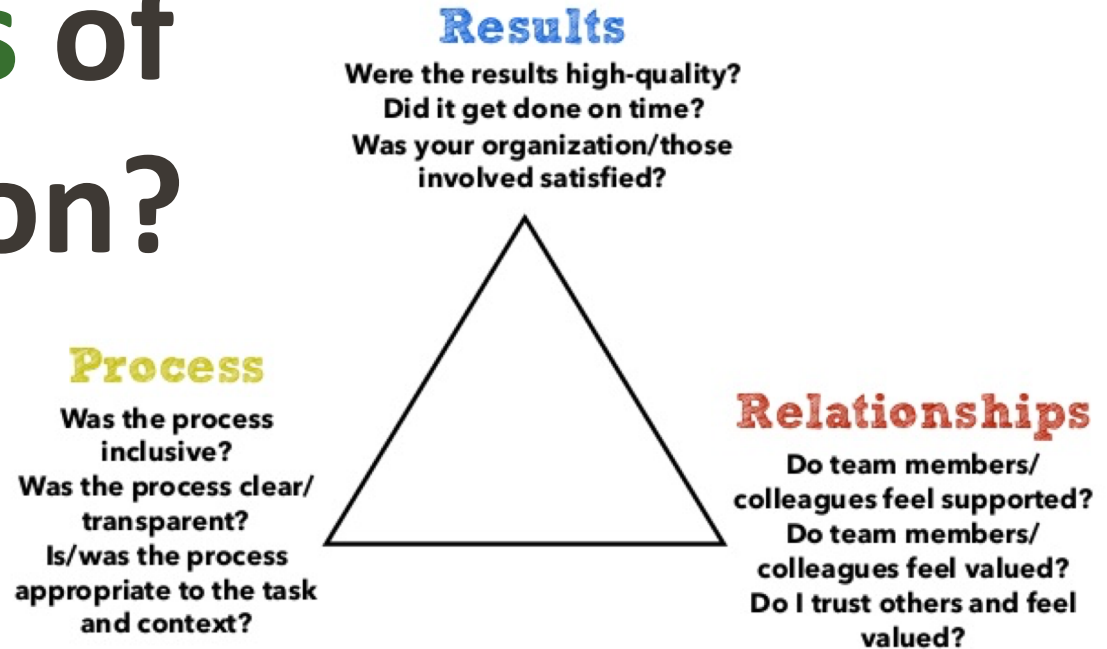
Table 1: Stages of Group Development

	<b>Group Structure</b> The pattern of interpersonal relationships; the way members act and relate to one another.	<b>Task Activity</b> The content of interaction as related to the task at hand.
<b>Forming:</b> orientation, testing and dependence	Testing and dependence	Orientation to the task
<b>Storming:</b> resistance to group influence and task requirements	Intragroup conflict	Emotional response to task demands
<b>Norming:</b> openness to other group members	Ingroup feeling and cohesiveness develop; new standards evolve and new roles are adopted	Open exchange of relevant interpretations; intimate, personal opinions are expressed
<b>Performing:</b> constructive action	Roles become flexible and functional; structural issues have been resolved; structure can support task performance	Interpersonal structure becomes the tool of task activities; group energy is channeled into the task; solutions can emerge
<b>Adjourning:</b> disengagement	Anxiety about separation and termination; sadness; feelings toward leader and group members	Self-evaluation

# What is facilitation?

Facilitation is supporting a group to engage in meaningful and productive conversations.

# What are the **goals** of facilitation?



# What are the **tasks** of facilitation?

- Helping the group decide on a structure and process for the session
- Creating the conditions that will enable the group to have productive conversations
- Helping the group form a shared perspective, at least in some respects
- Regulating the flow of discussion and ensuring inclusiveness - drawing out quiet people, or those with the most relevant expertise, and limiting those who tend to do a lot of the talking
- Keeping the meeting focussed and on time
- Clarifying and summarising points, testing for consensus
- Helping the group deal with conflicts
- Supporting a group through a decision-making process and formalising decisions
- Ensuring that a written record is made

# What is the **mindset** for facilitation?



## **Doing with not for**

- Enable participants
- Create a safe space
- Respect all perspectives
- The gold is in the room



## **Self awareness**

- Know your facilitation strengths & weaknesses
- Work with a co-facilitator who complements you
- Read how people react to you

# Stages of facilitation



# 1 Prep



*Identify the need for facilitation*



Develop session goals & objectives with key stakeholders



Identify and invite attendees  
Prepare attendees to participate



Decide on a structure and process  
Logistics: location, food, and facilities



Develop creative, participatory and visual activities



Conduct any pre-work, such as stakeholder interviews  
Share pre-reading and/or prep activities

## Choosing the right space

- Large enough for everyone - moving around
- Flexible furniture layout and room for group work
- Wall space, table space, white boards, flip charts

## Co-design considerations

- Will people with lived experience be part of the session?
- What value will they get out of the session?
- What might help them be prepared to participate?



# 1 Prep



## What type of conversation are you having?

*Depending on the length of your session, you may have one or more types of conversations*

Exploring & naming problems + opportunities

Identifying objectives & desired outcomes

Exploring & synthesising Insights

Idea & prototype development

Getting feedback & input

Strategy & planning

Problem solving

Decision-making

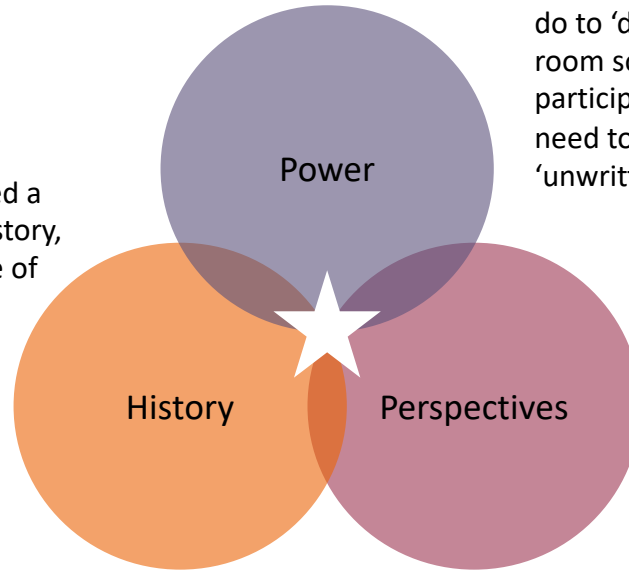
# 1 Prep



## What dynamics exist between people?

*In preparation for bringing a group together, consider the different dynamics that exist. What might be a source of alignment? What might be a source of tension? How can you design the session taking these into consideration?*

Can you establish a shared history, or a sense of history together?



What will you need to do to 'democratise' the room so everyone can participate? Do you need to work with 'unwritten rules'?

How might you establish respect for the different perspectives ...and find a way forward together?

## Sources of alignment or tension

*Note: Tension can be a source of transformation*

## 2 In sessions



*Setting structure and creating conditions for working together*

Start with an Acknowledgement or Welcome to Country

Establish the agenda, objectives, ground rules & orient people to where you are at in the process

Review past progress, e.g. definition of challenges, opportunities & outcomes



*Enabling productivity*

Use visual tools

Use of group activity

Provide instructions and materials, then get out of the way

Plan for live synthesis, theming and/or recap – so that the group knows what you have developed together



*Ensuring there is closure*

Plan to decide or produce something – “land the conversation”

Identify next steps and action owners

## Co-design considerations

What is needed to manage the dynamics so that all participants, including people with lived experience are able to contribute?

## 2 In sessions

### How will you work with group dynamics?



*Manage dynamics* - drawing out quiet people & relevant expertise; and limiting those who do a lot of talking



Keep energy flowing – warm ups and ice breakers



Stay focused – know when you're off track vs gaining depth



Notice and name the elephant



Signpost and mark transitions between conversations



Balance pace and goals with the needs of the group – ditch the plan when you need to



Taming tension: work through conflict and politics

## 2 In sessions

### Facilitation techniques to support conversation

- **Active listening** – paying attention to what is being said (and not being said), grasping what people are saying, asking questions to clarify
- **Asking open-ended questions** – to engage people in explaining their points more fully
- **Reflecting back** – paraphrasing what has been said in order to be sure the point is clear
- **Surfacing** – what is being said explicitly versus the implicit points, raising the implications of what is being discussed
- **Pulling threads** – connecting the dots between the different points that have been made and identifying themes in the conversation

# 3 After



Debriefing and continued planning with key stakeholders



Follow up communication and conversations



Developing and sharing documentation



Continued engagement and relationships

## Co-design considerations

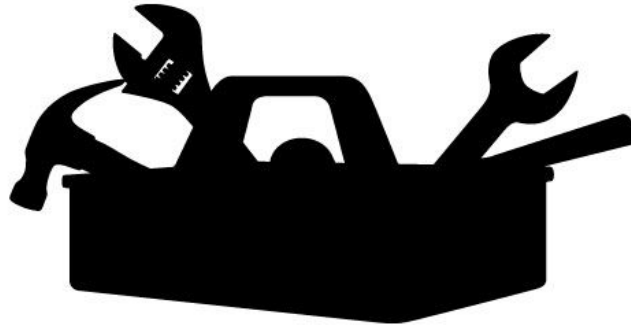
- Will people with lived experience take on actions?
- How will outcomes be communicated?
- How will you continue working with them?

# Build your toolbox!

*You are not on your own.*

*There are libraries of warm up, ice breaker and energy shifting activities*

*There are tools for each type of conversation...  
e.g. action planning, synthesis, getting feedback*



*There are several different ways to have the same conversation*

*What materials might come in handy? Sticky notes, markers, Lego, cut paper, etc...*

*There is usually a way to turn a laborious group discussion into a creative and fun activity (although sometimes the group needs a frank conversation)*

Thank you!