Managing Difficult Meeting Dynamics - Possible Approaches

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Common mistaken assumptions that can lead to problems for meeting facilitators

1. People want to be at the meeting.

2. Everyone is clear on the purpose of the meeting.

3. Everyone agrees on the purpose of the meeting.

4. There are no distractions, stresses or baggage that blocks participation.

5. People understand and appreciate the powers of a facilitator and are ready and willing to be facilitated.

6. Participants were carefully selected and all have clear roles.

7. Participants understand and accept their roles –and others'—completely.

8. There are no hidden agendas at play behind the scenes.

9. Everyone respects each other's opinions, even if they may have different viewpoints.

10. Neutrality as a facilitator means we ought not to be assertive.

11. Facilitators need to accept undesirable behavior.

12. Facilitators must acquiesce to the client sponsor/manager even if s/he strongly disagrees with the proposed approach.

13. Experienced facilitators don't really need to prepare very much.

14. If a group doesn't achieve its objectives, it's the facilitator's fault.

15. When people don't <u>disagree,</u> it means they agree – i.e., silence is consensus.

16. Commitments made at the meeting will be honored by all without prompting.

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An intervention is any action taken to improve a situation. It can be made preemptively, in the moment, or afterwards.
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When facilitator interventions make sense
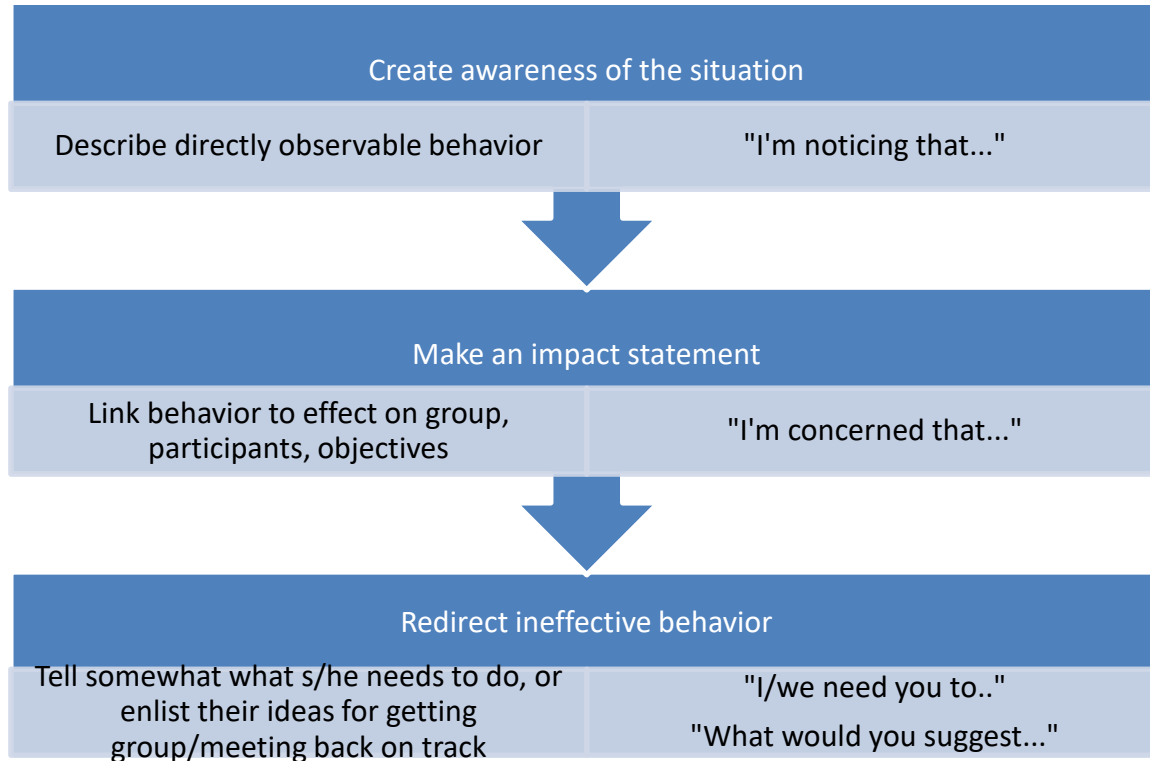
Types of interventions

- Pace

- Process

- Pulse

Knowing when to intervene

- How serious is the problem? - i.e., is it likely to derail the meeting, dampen enthusiasm, frustrate or anger participants, etc.?

- Will the problem just go away on its own? – i.e., if I ignore the problem, what could happen?

- How much time would it take to make an intervention? – i.e., which will take more time, to make the intervention or to ignore the problem?

- What kind of an intervention must I make, and how much of a disruption would that cause?

- How will an intervention affect group dynamics?

- Do I have the permission or authority of my sponsor and the team to make the kind of intervention needed (especially if it's a process or pulse type of intervention)?

- Can participants and the client sponsor handle the intervention I would need to make?

- To what extent will an intervention damage someone's self-esteem?

- If I *don't* make an intervention, is someone's self-esteem on the line?

- What's the risk? Am I prepared to handle the worst that could happen?

- Do I have enough credibility to pull this off?

- Do I have the confidence to handle this situation?

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Guidelines for effective intervention: Behavioral redirect

Create awareness of the situation	
Describe directly observable behavior	"I'm noticing that..."

Make an impact statement	
Link behavior to effect on group, participants, objectives	"I'm concerned that..."

Redirect ineffective behavior	
Tell somewhat what s/he needs to do, or enlist their ideas for getting group/meeting back on track	"I/we need you to.." "What would you suggest..."

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Overview

The following guide provides options for facilitators to address an individual, the entire group, or both, for certain challenging situations and behaviors they might face when facilitating meetings.

Regardless of the exact situation, the goal of the facilitator is to create an environment where all participants have an opportunity to contribute their best thinking, and where all voices can be heard, keeping in mind your meeting objectives and realistic time constraints. Try some of these things to say to effectively respond and keep your meeting productive.

Situations and Possible Approaches

SITUATION	IDEAS OF WHAT TO SAY*
To someone who is questioning their invitation/participation in the meeting or is requesting not attending despite being a key participant	• NAME, given the goals of our meeting are to XX, your perspectives and experiences will be invaluable in helping us reach our goals. I'm concerned that without your perspectives, we risk moving ahead with incomplete representation (or inaccurate information). Can I ask for your full participation today, and if at the end of the meeting you feel that someone else from your organization might be more appropriate, we can discuss how best to enlist a delegate? • NAME, it sounds like you feel your participation might not be vital in helping us to achieve our goals of XX. I'm concerned that without your perspectives, we might make a decision (or create a plan, etc.) that doesn't reflect your expertise and/or your organization's viewpoints. What would we need to do to make sure that your participation here would represent a good use of your time? • NAME, to successfully achieve our meeting goals, we need your perspectives and ideas. While many people would regret missing the opportunity to hear from you directly, let's find some ways to gather your input in advance (or afterwards) if you can't be available for this meeting.
To someone who is late to join the meeting, and asks to be caught up	• Hi, NAME. Here's where we are on the agenda. I had just asked everyone the question: "If we agree that full participation is important to achieve our goals for today, what does full participation look and sound like to you?" OTHER NAME was about to reply….OTHER NAME?" • Hi, NAME. Here's where we are on the agenda. I'm concerned that if I were to backtrack now, we wouldn't be able to achieve our objectives in our allotted time. I'd be happy to catch you up at break, or after this meeting, if you like."
To someone who did not come prepared to the meeting (did not do assigned pre-work), and asks you to review the assigned content now	• We're just about to dive into a conversation related directly to the prereading I had sent out last week. For anyone else who didn't have a chance to read it, I have copies here (or have pasted the URL here, if a virtual meeting), so you can review it now as the other share their ideas. As soon as you feel you're ready to participate, please feel free to jump right in. • I'm concerned that if I stop to review the content that was sent as prework, we'll lose too much time in the agenda. Since most people indicated they have read it, we'll start the conversation with them, and those who want to take a few minutes to review it now can join us when they feel ready.
To someone who did not follow up on assignment from prior meeting	• NAME, I'm concerned that this seems to be the first time we've learned that you would not have your assignment completed by today. We had talked about how everyone on the team is dependent on their fellow team members to complete assignments on time, or to alert people if they were at risk of not doing so. Can you share what may have prevented you from letting us know in advance? I want to make sure we all feel that this is a safe environment for letting us know when you need help, or when a deadline is at risk. • It's important that we all let each other know when assignments are unrealistic or unclear, to ensure that we don't have avoidable delays. NAME, I'm wondering what could have helped you to complete this assignment on time. For example, to what degree was the task unclear or the accountability ambiguous? To what extent was it unrealistic for you to have this done by today? Perhaps you were waiting on someone else to do their part first? • This is a good time for all of us to remember our agreed-upon team norm that we only commit to deliverables were are confident we can deliver on, and that if an unexpected barrier comes up, we alert team members immediately so we can work together to come up with a workaround.

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SITUATION	IDEAS OF WHAT TO SAY*
	• To the team: Let's take a few minutes to examine how we can track status, progress, and see what changes we can make to make sure that everyone is alerted as quickly as possible when things are off-track.

You will want to adjust your own response based on a number of variables, including whether the meeting is virtual, face-to-face or a "hybrid"; your relationship to the group; your relationship to the person demonstrating the behavior in question; your own personal communication style; and other factors.

*** Note – My actual guide contains more situations and suggested ways to address***