

Setting the right tone

Setting the right tone to a meeting is crucial and requires facilitators to understand the people and context they are going to be working with. This means asking around and checking ideas out with key people before you start. Asking the Design Group we describe in Room 2 can help a lot.

Icebreaker exercises

At the first meeting of the Community of Practice a Facilitator can learn a lot about the people attending through an initial icebreaker exercise. Icebreakers are to help people get to know a little about everyone in the group – names, what people do, why each person is at the meeting. There are lots to pick from but it's always a good idea to try to use one that relates to the task you're trying to do and doesn't take up too much time.

If you want to get people working together quickly, pick an icebreaker task to do as a group. One we recently took part in focussed on a paper clip and how many things you could do with it. Each person shared their list with others at their table, and then the tables shared theirs – naturally it got a little competitive, but everyone thought it was fun and it got people thinking creatively from the start of the meeting – which had been the intention.

Sometimes you want to check out how everyone feels before you start a meeting. Using emotion/feeling cards (there are lots of different styles on the internet) at the start of a meeting is a good way to do this. Each person picks a card as they enter the room, they then share their card and reasons for picking it with the rest of the group. You can use them again at the end to see if things have changed. If you do this exercise you have to be able to deal with positive and negative emotions being revealed, so think through how you will do this beforehand.

Ground rules

Setting ground rules is very important. The facilitator will always have some for people to work with, such as taking turns speaking, listening to others, not cutting across people. But it's important to remember that other members of the group may have some too, so always co-construct ground rules and check them out at the start of each meeting.

Ground rules should enable a group to be:

- ✓ respectful
- ✓ inclusive
- ✓ cooperative
- ✓ collaborative
- ✓ engaged in robust yet supportive critical dialogue
- ✓ working together towards actions that solve real problems.

Make decisions about breaks – it's important to set regular breaks to keep the energy levels up. If people are flagging, change direction, or have a break, or simply ask everyone to stand up (this works virtually too) for two minutes.

For tips on making the most of online meetings, go to

<https://padfieldpartnership.com/how-to-enliven-your-online-meetings-and-boost-the-energy-on-video-calls/>