



2nd

Los Angeles County

**FORENSIC
EPIDEMIOLOGY
CONFERENCE**



COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES

Public Health

January 19 and 20, 2005

Facilitator's Guide

Introduction

Facilitation is an often misunderstood function. The role of the facilitator is to enable discussion group participants to remain focused on a prearranged agenda or set of issues to attain stated objectives. Generally, facilitators are not subject matter experts (SMEs) in the area they are facilitating. In fact, in instances where they may be SMEs, they may tend to become more involved in addressing the issues at hand than in moderating the group effort.

This guide has been prepared to help the 2nd Los Angeles County Forensic Epidemiological Conference facilitation team members prepare for their roles in the conference. Participants come from across traditional and nontraditional public health, medical emergency response, and public safety functional areas and represent a variety of jurisdictions. The participation of high-level officials should not prevent facilitators, regardless of their levels of experience in the field of public health or law enforcement, from professional facilitation. The objective in assembling a facilitation team is not to try and match or surpass the professional qualifications of the participants, but to provide knowledgeable individuals who can moderate discussions and guide the various groups toward a common goal.

The basic tenets of this guide are equally applicable to any facilitated discussion-based setting. The guide has been specifically designed to foster commonality among the facilitators, provide guidance to assist in achieving stated conference goals, and help facilitators prepare for the conference.

General

The following points are based on cumulative experience gathered from the City, County and State levels. They are provided to help avoid the pitfalls frequently encountered in facilitating. Group dynamics evolve differently, so the relevancy of the points presented below will vary.

- The biological terrorism scenario presents a situation and addresses topical areas in which most participants have had little actual experience.
- Although the initial response effort may parallel what the medical and emergency response personnel routinely face, there are subtle and pronounced differences due to the aspect of terrorism.
- As a result, these participants may resist the scenario, and approach it in a manner that they find more comfortable and change the situation according to their preference.
- A fundamental guideline for facilitators is to help participants commit to the construct and intent of the tabletop as soon as possible.

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Scope

Protocols for facilitating discussions vary according to the construct being followed. In many cases, facilitators are required to prepare visual aids, make use of a wide range of support materials, arrange individual room setups, and maintain group focus over extended periods. For this conference, minimal preparation is required of facilitators.

- Each Discussion Area begins with a situation briefing.
- Following the briefing, each group will caucus (for about 60 minutes) to discuss the impact of the situation from their jurisdictional perspectives, and to answer specific questions about the situation.
- At the conclusion of each caucus a spokesperson from each group may be called upon to summarize salient points from their discussion.
- The duty of the facilitator is to ensure that each group has a spokesperson, helps moderate the caucus discussions, and helps summarize the discussions.
- In addition, a member of each group should be assigned to maintain notes and prepare the group's answers for submission.
- The emphasis will be on identifying strengths and weaknesses in the State and local approach to the situation.

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Conference Schedule of Events

Conference Agenda

Day 1

8:30- 8:45 a.m.	Welcome	Sharon Grigsby
8:45-9:00 a.m.	Health Officer	Jonathan Fielding, M.D.
9:00 – 9:30 a.m.	L.A. County Role	Sheriff Lee Baca
9:30-10:00 a.m.	F.B.I	Special Agent Kris Beardsley
10:00-10:15 a.m.	Coffee Break	
10:15-10:45 a.m.	Public Health	Richard Jackson, M.D.
10:45-11:15 a.m.	CA State Lab	David Jensen
11:15-11:45 a.m.	Public Health Law	Pete Baldrige, J.D.

11:45 – 12:30 p.m. Lunch

12:30 – 1:15 p.m.	L.A.P.D. Role	Chief William Bratton
1:15 – 2:45 p.m.	Breakout Session Scenario 1	
2:45-3:00 p.m.	Break	
3:00-4:00 p.m.	Breakout Discussion	Phillip Moore
4:00-4:30 p.m.	NYC FBI Public Health MOU	Joel Ackelsberg, M.D.
4:30-4:45 p.m.	Closing Highlights	Sharon Grigsby

Day 2

8:30 a.m.	Intro	Sharon Grigsby
8:45 – 9:15 a.m.	L.A. County Fire - HazMat	Bill Jones
9:15 – 9:30 a.m.	Breakout Instructions	Phillip Moore
9:30-9:45 a.m.	Break	
9:45-11:00 a.m.	Scenario 2 Discussion	
11:00-12:00 p.m.	Breakout Discussion Scenario 2	

12:00 – 1:00 p.m. Lunch

1:00-2:15 p.m.	Orange County Biofem	Ken Miller, M.D., PhD, O.C. Fire Rick Handfield, Irvine Police Sheldon Fong, F.B.I
2:15-2:30 p.m.	Break	
2:30-3:00 p.m.	TEW & Norwalk Move	Sgt. Mike Kelleher, LASD, TEW
3:00-3:30 p.m.	What Rally Happens: The D.C. Anthrax Experience	Ivan Walks, M.D.
3:45-4:00 p.m.	Closing Remarks	Sharon Grigsby

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Conference Objectives

The conference is limited in duration and scope and intended primarily as a starting point for follow-on individual State, regional, and local conferences. During the conference participants will do the following:

1. **Demonstrate an understanding of the similarities and differences in PH and LE investigative goals and methods.** Do you now feel that you have a fuller understanding the interactions between LE and PH during investigations?
2. **Describe specimen collection and establishment of chain of custody of evidence.** Do you now feel that you more fully understand the evidence chain of custody procedures?
3. **Coordinate public health and law enforcement activities during responses and investigations.** Do you feel that the presentations and group discussions allowed you to have a greater understanding of PH and LE coordination activities during a response and investigation?
4. **Coordinate local, state, and federal resources.** Do you feel that you have a better understanding of the type and level of coordination that may be needed between the levels of government?
5. **Describe on-scene control measures and interventions.** Do you feel that on-scene control measures and interventions were adequately covered during this conference?
6. **Communicate and share information between law enforcement and public health.** Do you feel that you have a greater understanding regarding the kinds and volume of information which is being shared or should be shared and communicated between investigating agencies?

Conference Participants

Conference participants include personnel involved in the design, development, and execution of the event, as well as those for whom the conference was designed. For this conference, the categories of participants are the following:

- **Planners.** Conference planners from the County of Los Angeles: Department of Health Services – Public Health, Fire Department, Sheriff’s Department; County of Los Angeles Terrorism Early Warning (TEW) Group; Los Angeles City: Fire Department, Police Department, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). During the conduct of the conference, these individuals commonly assume roles as SMEs and facilitators. Rarely, because of the depth of knowledge they have of the conference scenario and case studies, will planners also be players thorough many often “participate” as observers.
- **Players.** Individuals who represent participating jurisdictions and agencies in the conference are classified as players. They are expected to be familiar with their jurisdictions or agency’s role in response to situations presented during the multimedia presentation.

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- **Facilitators.** Facilitators ensure the discussion flows and the participants focus on achieving objectives and aims. Although their selection to oversee group dynamics indicates a familiarity with Federal, State, and local plans and topical areas addressed, they should not be considered SMEs.
- **Subject Matter Experts (SMEs).** SMEs have thorough knowledge of a job or an area of expertise that qualifies them to help players the investigatory and subsequent decision process in their breakout groups.
- **Recorders.** Recorders are charged with capturing pertinent information during each plenary session. This data is used to support the team leader’s summation at the conclusion of the conference. It is supplemented by the answers each table prepares and by notes taken by the facilitators for the conference summary report.
- **Observers.** Observers typically represent organizations that have an interest in the conference but are not involved in the play, or additional representatives of playing organizations who monitor what is occurring but who are not actively engaged in the discussions.

Facilitators

Facilitator’s Responsibilities. Facilitators are responsible for coordinating their group’s activities throughout the day and helping them attain conference objectives. Facilitator responsibilities include the following:

- Focusing the group’s discussions on the specific areas/questions identified.
- Keeping group discussions at the appropriate level.
- Eliciting resolutions to issues arising from the scenario.
- Ensuring a group spokesperson is designated and prepared to report on group discussions during the plenary session.
- Monitoring the group recorder and preparing notes on the group’s discussions to support preparation of the breakout group speakers’ session summation.

Facilitator’s Preparation. Facilitators will be assigned to individual breakout group tables. Generally, most preparations should be completed before arrival at the conference site. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Review the applicable plans, policies, and procedures to ensure a basic understanding of the system and the potential issues that could arise.
- Review and understand Conference Objectives. There these be your guideline for facilitating the group and keeping it on track.
- Review the Conference Handbook and its reference documents to plan how to help the group attain the conference goals.

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- Develop a familiarity with the scenario. The scenario should be a tool and frame of reference to support discussion and examine the coordination of multiple agency capabilities. The scenario should not be an obstacle to achieving overarching objectives.
- Develop a personal strategy for facilitating the group. Use information provided and prior experience to prepare supplemental questions to guide the flow of discussion and augment the specific questions in the Conference Handbook. Review the makeup of your group; your approach toward each individual will differ based on their level within their organization or community and their level of experience. **Remember, you are not a player! You are present to help the group address issues and reach conclusions.**
- Review the conference summary format and help summarize your group’s activities for inclusion in the post-conference summary. Areas of interest for inclusion in the summary might include specific answers to the conference questions, key group concerns, identified shortcomings, potential solutions, assessment of objective attainment, and systemic strengths.

Facilitator’s Guidance. The following points are presented as guidelines to help execute facilitator responsibilities. In addition, Appendix A provides an overview of various situations previously encountered by facilitators, along with recommended courses of action. An awareness of these guidelines may assist in preparation and in handling various situations effectively.

- Each breakout group will be a mixture of professional disciplines from multiple locations (i.e., city, county, State, Federal). Before the initial conference welcome, facilitators should introduce themselves to their table participants.
- At the start of the first breakout/caucus period, facilitators should briefly explain their role, and players should introduce themselves.
- Facilitators provide a brief overview of player requirements, address each question, designate a member to prepare written notes of the discussion, and identify a group spokesperson(s). (If the players prefer, it is acceptable to have a different spokesperson for each “Report Out”). A report out is when an individual from the breakout group reports highlights of their discussion to the other conference participants. In this way each group gets to heard what other groups spoke about. This increases the discussion experience. There are two breakout sessions with corresponding report outs in this conference.
- Facilitators monitor time during the breakout period to ensure the group’s ability to address each question, summarize the discussion, and prepare plenary comments. The group should not get bogged down by peripheral matters.
- During the breakout caucus period:
 - Remember that the players are the SMEs. Limit your involvement in the actual discussions but use your expertise to increase discussion on points that increase group understanding and knowledge on overall investigatory responses.

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- Your pre-conference preparation will have allowed you to give the issues more thought than the players, so you may have to take the lead and provide direction to generate discussion. Ask open-ended questions such as “what, when, where, how, and why?”
- When the players direct questions to you, deflect them to others for a response to avoid becoming a player.
- Ensure discussions remain within the scope of the given Discussion Area. Sometimes the conversation may begin to drift to topics more appropriate for discussion in later periods.
- Do not allow discussions to drag on. In the interest of time and achieving objectives, regulate the amount of time spent on topics to maximize the benefit derived.
- Involve all participants; do not let one or two players monopolize the discussions.
- Assist the group by summarizing a point, restating a key discussion point, and asking specific individuals to comment.

Facilitator’s Principles. Some basic principles to help deal with problems you may encounter are the following:

- Adequate preparation is the best safeguard against serious problems. Do not assume that because you have facilitated before, preparation is not necessary.
- Understand what the group expects of you, and let them know what you expect of them.
- Be flexible; have alternative ideas on how to achieve conference goals. Develop and use a personal facilitation strategy.
- There are no wrong player answers; always respond in a positive manner, such as, “That’s an interesting perspective. Would anyone like to comment on it?”
- Do not be too serious when you confront a problem. A little humor can make the situation much easier to handle. Try to anticipate problems you might have.
- Make sure the group understands that you and they share responsibility for the success or failure of the session.
- Be honest at all times; if you do not know an answer, say so and then try and find it.

Scenario #1

- This scenario involves many school aged children who have become ill with a mysterious gastrointestinal disease after a school field trip to a nearby Nature Center with ponds and other water sources.
- It has been discovered that the areas surrounding several different water tanks in Los Angeles County have been broken into. An unclaimed backpack has been found with

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several containers and an unknown powder nearby. From this information, terrorism is suspect.

- After careful investigation, the agent is *cryptosporidium parvum*. However, it is a naturally occurring agent within one of the water sources at the Nature Center and terrorism is not the culprit. There is one death as a result.

Cryptosporidiosis Facts

- Cryptosporidiosis is a diarrheal disease caused by microscopic parasites of the genus *Cryptosporidium*. It is a disease that directly affects the GI, biliary, and respiratory tracts.
- It has been identified worldwide and has occurred in humans, cattle and other domesticated animals. It is generally identified by fecal smears that contain the oocysts or by intestinal biopsy sections.
- The mode of transmission is via the fecal-oral route, which includes person-to-person, animal-to-person, waterborne and food borne transmission. You can not become infected through contact with blood.
- The symptoms for cryptosporidiosis include, watery diarrhea, dehydration, weight loss, stomach cramps or pain, fever, nausea and vomiting.
- Symptoms of cryptosporidiosis generally begin 2 to 10 days after becoming infected with the parasite.
- Those who are most likely to become infected include, children who attend day cares, child care workers, parents of infected children, international travelers, backpackers and hikers who drink unfiltered/untreated water, swimmers who swallow water while swimming in contaminated waters.
- There is no treatment other than rehydration that has been proven effective. Most people who have a healthy immune system will recover without treatment.
- Prevention measures include, isolating infected individuals, practicing good hygiene, avoiding food and water that might be contaminated and if contamination is suspect boil water for 1 minute and use water filters that can remove particles 0.1-1.0 micrometers in diameter.

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Scenario #2

- This scenario involves a greater number of exposed and ill individuals. Most were in attendance at the annual Los Angeles County Boat Show in the convention center.

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- Thousands of people attend the Boat Show, many of whom report to their physicians, hospitals and clinics for proper medical attention. Many report with flu-like symptoms, including high fevers, aches and pains, nausea, and difficulty breathing.
- After noticing increasing rates of this illness, physicians, hospitals and clinics contact the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services – Public Health.
- Treatment for many of the patients shows no positive results, and patients are experiencing greater difficulty breathing, as well as pulmonary edema.
- After discussions with local and state public health and medical officials, officials with the CDC now strongly suspect a toxin-based disease outbreak. They believe that the outbreak is most likely caused by aerosol exposure to a toxin.
- The agent specified for causing the illness is the Ricin toxin from *Ricinus communis*, known to come from the castor bean.
- Federal, State, and local public health officials advise city and State officials that based on several factors, that this is most likely a deliberate bioterrorist attack. There are several deaths as a result of the attack.

Ricin Facts

- Ricin is a poison that can be made from the waste left over from processed castor beans. It can be in the form of powder, a mist, or a pellet, or it can be dissolved in water or weak acid. It is a stable substance, and can withstand very hot or very cold temperatures.
- Ricin can be found worldwide. However, accidental exposure to ricin is highly unlikely.
- Ricin can be inhaled, swallowed with water or food, or injected. Depending on the dose, ricin can be very deadly.
- Ricin works within human cells and causes cell death. The effects depend upon the route of entry.
- There is no antidote for ricin, so the main form of treatment if possible is expelling the toxin from the body as soon as possible. The key to survival is avoiding ricin exposure in the first place.
- The signs and symptoms of ricin exposure vary according to route of entry.
 - Inhalation: People experience respiratory distress, fever, cough, nausea, and tightness in the chest. Heavy sweating, with a bluish appearance in the skin and pulmonary edema may follow.
 - Ingestion: People who ingest the ricin toxin, often experience vomiting, diarrhea and severe dehydration with low blood pressure. Other signs or symptoms may include hallucinations, seizures, and blood in the urine.

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Appendix A

What Can Go Wrong And What To Do About It

“Situations That Try Trained Facilitators”

The following examples of facilitators’ experiences address a broad range of potential problem areas facilitators face. Although not all the examples directly pertain to what we might anticipate, they have been included because of a possible correlation to situations arising during the conference. Passing an issue to a local participant or a SME, if available, can often provide a buffer during tense situations and minimize any disruption to the group effort.

The time factor of the conference will preclude many of the depicted situations from occurring. If any of these situations does occur, however, the effect on the caucus period may be adverse. Under the best of circumstances, problems may occur. If you are aware of problems as they arise and are prepared to deal with them, you can usually prevent them from marring the session. There are a number of things you can do when you recognize a problem exists.

The goal is not to be intimidated by problems. It is very rare for a group meeting to proceed perfectly, and problems are not necessarily indicators of poor facilitation on your part. The facilitator’s job is to be aware of incipient problems and to help the group resolve them. The following discussions of some typical difficulties and suggestions for handling them are provided for your review and consideration. The discussions do not purport to represent the school solution, but are merely recommendations.

Situation 1. People are not participating.

An individual or small fraction of the group has obviously dropped out of, or never gotten into, the discussion, although the group as a whole appears to be functioning well.

- Try to determine whether this behavior is disruptive to the rest of the group. (Is the individual staring quietly into space, or blatantly distracting others?) If the behavior is disruptive, the dropout may be expressing some dissatisfaction with the group that he or she did not feel free to verbalize. Ask the dropout if there is any comment he or she would like to contribute. You are thus offering the person an opportunity to make any criticism that relates to the disruptive behavior, and allowing the group an opportunity to deal with the problem. This solution has some potential risks. One is that the individual involved may feel threatened at being singled out. Another is that the group may become bogged down discussing the needs or problems of one person, which may not relate to the purpose of the meeting. You should try to read the situation and ascertain the impact before deciding to deal with the issue openly with the group.
- If no disruption is involved, and normal attempts to include the person in group activity are ineffective, it is generally best to wait for a break and approach the dropout privately to ask about the problem in a low-key, friendly, concerned manner. A private encounter is often (though not always) less threatening and is more likely to elicit an honest

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response. This may also prevent a time-consuming digression within the group. Often the answer will simply be, “I’m not up for participation today. I have a lot of other things on my mind.” You should accept and respect this kind of answer. It is not the facilitator’s job to force everyone to be interested and active in the group if there are outside factors preventing this. However, if the problem has something to do with the purpose or process of the group, the facilitator can bring it to the attention of the whole group, perhaps by encouraging the individual to express the concerns involved.

The whole group, or a substantial portion, is not actively participating.

- Consider reviewing the group goals that were set up at the beginning of the session. People may feel that what is happening is irrelevant to their concerns. The proceedings may have become too abstract or intellectual. This may be the time to introduce a specific question or role play that will encourage some expression and participation.
- The group may feel that the session is wandering or that there is no movement toward group goals. It is important to preserve a sense of some sort of structure and movement within the group discourse. This is where an agenda or timetable is invaluable. You may refer to this as a way of reminding the group of the status of its progress and as a way of allowing changes in the schedule if feelings have changed.
- It may be time for a break. Participants’ attention spans may be waning. When people are tired, hungry, or physically uncomfortable from sitting too long, participation will quickly drop.
- Interjection of humor or something unexpected into the discussion is a temporary way of drawing interest back into the group. Use it to focus attention on whatever you suspect the real problem to be.
- You may be working at too complex or too simple a level (see Situation 3).
- People may be intimidated by the facilitator or some other person in the group (e.g., a person with a dominating personality or a supervisor). Directing questions toward the rest of the group in the former case, or asking for someone else to respond in the latter, may help to break down inhibitions and get the conversation moving.

Situation 2. Some participants are causing interruptions.

A participant may have a tendency to cut off the current speaker with a comment of his or her own, or to detract from what the group is doing by leading the conversation to an irrelevant topic. Usually, if you diplomatically point out what is happening, the problem will be remedied. However, if the interruptions are occurring in a fast-paced, emotional discussion, other measures may be needed. Suggesting a minute of silence may be enough to cool things off, as may asking people to talk slowly. A classic technique is to use some object, such as a coin, that is passed from speaker to speaker, and only the person with the object in hand is allowed to speak.

People getting up to go to the bathroom, to get a drink, to call their office, etc., causes another sort of interruption. Depending on the circumstances, this can be counterproductive. Having

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established procedural guidelines and scheduled breaks should minimize this type distraction, unless there is an underlying cause, such as boredom.

Situation 3. The material is too simple/complex for the group.

If the situation is too simple for the group, boredom will result. Similarly, if it is too complex, you can expect confusion and blank looks. Unfortunately, blank looks and boredom look remarkably alike, so it is not always easy to figure out which problem you are facing.

Try to be sensitive to how the group is responding to material you use, and be prepared to adapt to their level. Following are some things that will help you be alert to the group's level of comprehension:

- Before beginning the breakout-caucus session, ask if members of the group have ever done anything similar.
- Begin a session by asking for some background information on the group's previous experiences, if you do not already know.
- Stop occasionally and ask if the group understands what you are doing.
- Define any terms you may use in a specialized sense, such as "evaluation" or "group process." Avoid using facilitator jargon and acronyms.
- Make sure everyone is following you. Responses from the same few people may mean that the rest of the group is far behind or far ahead.
- If participants are moving at your speed, you can generally see it in their faces and in their level of participation. Nodding heads, interested expressions, and occasional questions or comments are good signs.
- The type of question asked is the best indicator of the level of comprehension. People asking you to repeat what you just said, or questions about the terms you are using, are signs that you are on too complex a level. Questions that are surprisingly knowledgeable, showing familiarity with what you are introducing, or incorporating points or terms that you have not yet used, are signals that you are on too simple a level.
- If only one person is having difficulty comprehending what is happening, or is puzzling over one particular point when the rest of the group is satisfied, do not take an excessive amount of time dealing with that person during group time. Do not brush the person off, but suggest that because the rest of the group is ready to move on, the two of you can discuss the subject further during a break or after the meeting. In the same way, do not leave the rest of the group far behind while you have an exclusive interchange with one or two members of the group who are more sophisticated than the others in a certain area. Suggest that you return to a discussion involving the entire group.

Situation 4. The group criticizes the facilitator.

If you have not initially set yourself up as the leader and focal point, and if you made it clear that the group bears responsibility for whatever happens, it is unlikely that you will be criticized by

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the group. Making your role clear early in the meeting provides you with a precedent you can refer to if the group should forget its collective nature.

Nonetheless, the group may criticize the facilitator for a variety of reasons, including the following:

- The most common criticism is to use the facilitator as the scapegoat for group failures. This can be turned into a constructive situation, so it helps not to be defensive. Let the group vent its frustrations, even give it encouragement, but try to steer comments away from personal attacks and toward identification of particular problems. Then, after all dissatisfactions have been aired and emotions have cooled, lead the discussion into possible solutions. For example, someone may attack by saying that you, the facilitator, are responsible for wasting their time with this event. Others in the group may agree. Listen to them. Rather than trying to defend yourself or justify each of your actions, re-emphasize the purpose of the conference, its goals, and the group's role in achieving these.
- There may be underlying problems fostered by your method of facilitating. Get the group to address what these are and how they might have been avoided. Focus not only on what you could have done but also what the group as a whole might have done. Make the point that everyone has a responsibility to make suggestions and provide solutions to the common group problems, and that you can help this process only to the extent that others are willing to contribute and cooperate. Listen to the criticisms of your facilitation and remember them for future consideration. Facilitators are not meant to be perfect—in fact, we do most of our learning from our mistakes. Direct feedback on your role is not always easy to take, but it can be valuable.

Situation 5. There is not enough time to do what you had planned.

This is the most common problem you are apt to encounter.

- When you review the agenda or build your facilitation strategy around someone else's, it is more common to underestimate the amount of time needed for a section than it is to overestimate. Make allowances by leaving time margins in your plans. Remember to account for the fact that people may be late, that they will probably spend time chatting with each other before they will want to get down to business, and that a few will always extend the breaks beyond the scheduled amount of time.
- If your interaction detracts from the time allotted for player discussion of critical agenda items, you are possibly becoming too involved. Likewise, if you lose control of the discussion periods, you may have to shorten subsequent activities or extend the duration of the conference.
- Request that someone in the group be responsible for keeping track of time; you may be too involved to remember to do it yourself.
- It helps to prioritize items on an agenda and deal with the most important ones first. This makes later curtailment easier.

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- Remind the group when time limits are being approached or exceeded.
- If it becomes apparent that time will be short, discuss alternatives with the group, such as extending the meeting, scheduling a later meeting, etc.

Situation 6. There is more time than you planned for.

There is nothing wrong with concluding a session a little early. People usually prefer this to having a session run over its time limit. Do not try to cover up the extra time with “filler” (such as extra long discussions or unnecessary issues). If there is something valuable to do in the time remaining that either you or the group can suggest, by all means, proceed. (It is always a good idea to prepare extra items to be used in case there is time or in case a substitution is necessary.) On the other hand, if you simply drag out the agenda with space filler, the meeting will seem to move very slowly and will lose its sense of momentum; the extra time will be wasted or even counterproductive. Be especially wary of discussions that can drag on long past the point that real information has been exchanged and repetition has begun.

Situation 7. Too few or too many people show up.

How many people are “too many” or “too few” depends on the particular situation. In many cases, you will have little control over the size of your group or audience.

- Your strategy should include the possibility of a larger or smaller group than you expect, and you should have ideas in mind on how to cope with this possibility.
- When you review the agenda, provide leeway in the amount of discussion time, especially if there is doubt as to the size of the group. When a group is too large (or when there is a clear division in members’ interests), you may want to divide the group into smaller discussion groups. This is one circumstance in which it is especially convenient to have additional facilitators. If you are facilitating alone, you can move between groups, or you can get volunteers from the group to facilitate the smaller sections.
- Having a smaller group than anticipated is more of a psychological hindrance than a real one. A small group can do everything a larger group can do. If those who did come exhibit disappointment about the low turnout, it is good to emphasize the positive aspects of the situation to restore people’s spirits. Start the session with a brief discussion of the reasons for the low turnout, point out what the group still can accomplish, and reaffirm everyone’s intentions of continuing.
- If the group turns out to be quite small, you can work with a much looser structure, although structure should not be abandoned entirely. You will be able to be more flexible and informal, and participants will be able to interact on a more personal level.

Situation 8. Facilities are inadequate for your purposes.

It is a good idea to prepare for this contingency in advance by finding out what the facilities will be, or better still, visiting them yourself. If another person is making the arrangements, make it

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clear what you will need in the way of equipment, space, and furniture. Build time into your schedule to arrive early enough to examine the facilities and implement a fallback position if necessary. For example, if you show up and things are not what you expected, consider the options available: Can the furniture be moved around? Can you move to a different location? Can you reconfigure your breakout organization?

Situation 9. Temptation to dominate proceedings with your own opinions.

Although you will not usually find your own opinions to be a problem, you must recognize that the facilitator is not a detached observer of everything that is going on. There may be occasions when you will be tempted to dominate the proceedings with your own opinions. Because you, as the facilitator, are in a position to talk freely and exert control, you should be careful that your own feelings and viewpoints are not the only ones being discussed by the group. Monitor the discussion to see if the participants' reactions are being elicited and acknowledged. When group members speak, are they addressing their comments primarily to you, or do they include the whole group? The inexperienced facilitator is prone to being too active, believing that he or she must respond to every little hitch in the proceedings with a comment or suggestion. Be patient and give things a chance to work out before you take action.

Situation 10. Arguments break out in the group.

This is a difficult situation to handle, especially because some agendas are designed to bring out counterpositions. The most important thing is to move the discussion away from personalities and toward the actual problem. Try rephrasing the comments into general questions to the group. It is best to discourage a back-and-forth exchange between two people and to emphasize drawing others (who are more neutral and less involved in the personal antagonisms) into the discussion. Some specific approaches you might take include the following:

- Ask the rest of the group to comment on the exchange.
- Restate the issue being discussed with the hope of clarifying it and introducing breathing space in a fast-paced discussion.
- Focus a question toward one of the involved parties, asking for more specific reasons for a particular point of view; then ask someone else with an interest in the discussion to comment.
- Ask each of the opponents to summarize the other's point of view. Sometimes simple misunderstandings of each other's positions are at the base of an argument; stating the opponent's beliefs and giving an opportunity to correct misperceptions can lead to conflict resolution.
- The seating arrangement can also have a subtle effect on this kind of situation. The best setup would be for the disagreeing participants to be seated next to each other with the facilitator directly across from both people. This is hard to accomplish, but might occur during a recess after which people are encouraged to come back to different seats (thus, the advantage of informal seating in any session). It is generally best for the facilitator to

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avoid sitting next to either antagonist, or next to anyone with whom you may be interacting strongly.

- Sometimes, there is someone in the group who seems excessively argumentative, picking minor points in the discussion as opportunities to challenge other people or to engage in lengthy debate. It is quite easy to see how such an individual may annoy group members who want to proceed to other topics. When someone repeatedly bogs down discussion in petty argument, ask the other members of the group if they want to continue the argument or move on. It may be more efficient for you to cut off the offender yourself, but if you do this repeatedly there is the risk that person will come to resent you. By encouraging others to express their wishes, you can reinforce control of the group by its members.

These suggestions have the advantage of interrupting a one-on-one exchange without shifting the topic from the area of disagreement. This is desirable because other members of the group may have an interest in what is going on but have no chance to enter into the discussion, and because it is best to deal with disagreements openly rather than dismissing them. Disagreements that are not resolved create frustrations and tend to recur later in more virulent form. Serious arguments that are resolved, however, sometimes move the group along significantly.

Situation 11. You have been misrepresented to the group, or they to you.

It is assumed that during your coordination with the group or its representatives, you will have clarified what your function will be and what the group expects of you, but there is always the possibility of faulty communication somewhere in the procedure. If you have been misrepresented to the group consider the following:

- When you get together with a new group, one of the first things you should do is explain clearly what your role is and what you plan to do. Hopefully, any misconceptions on the group's part or your own will be cleared up at this point, but not necessarily. False expectations can be remarkably tenacious.
- Try to look for signs of mistaken expectations. Are questions being addressed to you about matters on which you have no expertise? Do people look to you for approval at every step? Are people unduly reluctant to give suggestions or participate? Do participants seem confused or resistant to what you are trying to do? Does it seem that you and the group are going in different directions? If there are signs that the group is expecting something other than what it is getting, you should immediately bring your suspicions into the open so the group can clarify what they were expecting. Hopefully, either the group will be willing to accept something different than what they had expected or you will be able to modify your own plans, or both.

After working with a group for a short while, you may realize that you did not really know what you were getting into. If the group has been misrepresented to you, you have three options:

- You may obtain more information from the group to do a good job of facilitating the rest of the session. The group has, for instance, different problems than the ones you expected, but you need to know more about these before you plan accordingly. Be open

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about the situation, because acquiring needed information will require either time out of the agenda or delaying the meeting until after you can learn more about the group. Taking time out to gather information does not always have to detract from the meeting's purpose. Sometimes a group can profit in its own understanding by defining itself for an objective outsider.

- There may be occasions when you do not think you can continue to facilitate or function in the group and must drastically change your role. (For example, you are a relatively young and new facilitator and you find yourself interacting with much older, senior-level individuals who are not receptive to your involvement.) In such a situation, it would not be fair either to walk out or to pretend that no conflict exists. It would be best to explain your position and what you can or cannot do with the group. If an accommodation can be reached, it will be through an honest discussion.
- You may decide to say nothing. Sometimes you will be surprised by what you find in a group (e.g., they turn out to be more disorganized and unstructured than you expected). If you can see how the group is different from your expectations, there will be little point in taking up group time discussing how and why your preconceptions proved wrong. Simply modify your plans according to the new situation. This situation is one you will probably experience sooner or later because you will never really know what to expect of an unfamiliar group until you have actually worked with it.