

***A Tool Kit for the Facilitative Leader: Options for Social Workers***

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***Provided to Supplement***

## **Facilitative Leadership in Social Work Practice**

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**SPRINGER**  **PUBLISHING COMPANY**

ISBN: 978-0-8261-9923-2  
Digital Product

# Contents

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## **A Tool Kit for the Facilitative Leader: Options for Social Workers 1**

- Appreciative Inquiry 1
- Ball of Yarn Two: Celebrations and Appreciations 2
- Brainstorming (How to Think Things Up) 3
- Concurrent Exploring 5
- Creative Thinking: 1,001 Ways to Use a Paperclip 5
- Feedback Loops 6
- Force Field Analysis 7
- Icebreakers 9
- The Miracle Question 10
- Nameplate Exercise 11
- Pluses and Wishes 12
- Rotating Rounds 14
- Sample Agenda 14
- Scaling 15
- Sequenced Sharing 17
- Success Matrix 17
- SWOC (Formerly Known as SWOT) for Facilitative Leaders 18
- Turning Off the Volume 19

## A Tool Kit for the Facilitative Leader: Options for Social Workers

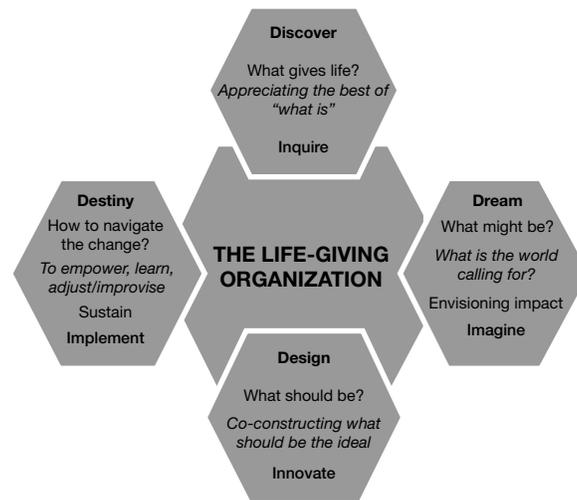
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We mentioned in *Facilitative Leadership in Social Work Practice* that the facilitative leader, in order to assist the group, needs the capability to make process suggestions when appropriate. In this tool kit, we offer some suggested tools that can come in handy during the process to move things forward. We have created a few of these tools ourselves; others we have adapted from oft-used models of process tools for group dynamics.

### APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

It is fitting that the first tool on facilitative leadership for social workers is appreciative inquiry (AI). You will find a remarkable fit between AI and social work values, principles, and the leadership practices espoused in *Facilitative Leadership in Social Work Practice*. David Cooperrider, a doctoral student in the 1980s, developed AI while conducting organizational analyses of health care systems. Traditional analyses of this type examine organizational deficits and problems, but Cooperrider observed, and was drawn to, the levels of cooperation, innovation, mutual support, and egalitarian management in extremely complex systems. With AI, Cooperrider (1986) proposed a new, positive method of investigation by focusing on what is working best for the organization. He described this method as one “co-appreciative [mode] of questioning, valuing, knowing, choosing, and enacting” (p. iv). AI uses a narrative-based process in which people tell stories of what works well and when have they functioned at their best (Jenkins, 2005; Rodas-Meeker & Meeker, 2005). The stories are used to envision how those strengths can be used to develop greater future successes with the underlying belief that “what we focus on becomes our reality” (Coghlan, Preskill, & Catsambas, 2003, p. 10).

For the “life-giving” organization (or group, community, etc.), the steps for AI are known as the *4-D Model* or the *4-I Model*, as illustrated in Figure A.1. Each of the steps provides guiding concepts and questions. The group’s purpose or challenge (e.g., “life-giving organization”) should be used to develop additional questions in each of the four areas that are specific to the group’s goal. Facilitative leaders may create questions themselves for the group but, in true coinvestigative spirit, we recommend that the group itself identify the right questions for each of the four stages. AI is one of the most affirming, energizing, and fun ways to address change. It lends itself to many facilitative leadership functions: visioning, assessing needs, evaluating, planning, and conducting action research, among others.



**Figure A.1.** Appreciative inquiry: Combined four D and four I models.

Adapted from *Positive Approaches to Change: Applications of Solutions Focus and Appreciative Inquiry at Work*, S. Abbotson & P. Lustig (2004), SolutionsBooks, pp. 93–106; *New Directions for Evaluation*, A. T. Coghlan, H. Preskill, & T. T. Catsambas (2003), 100, 5–22.

## BALL OF YARN TWO: CELEBRATIONS AND APPRECIATIONS

LIZ: What you need for this particular tool is a ball of yarn. Seriously.

To celebrate, I sometimes use a variation of Roger’s colored yarn exercise (see Introduction in *Facilitative Leadership in Social Work Practice*) with two main differences:

1. Use a real skein of multicolored yarn (not Roger’s imaginary strings)
2. Each person takes one turn only

This celebration works with a small group (no more than 30) of people who have worked together over time and all members know each other at least minimally.

All members stand in a circle. The facilitative leader holds the ball of multicolored yarn and gives a short opening statement that may include such points as:

- Acknowledgment of what we have accomplished so far (we do not need to have finished or met all of our goals), how every member contributes to what we’ve achieved
- How we learn and thrive from that process: We become better contributors to our community, our agency, to each other—whatever fits the group’s focus
- Further, our forward movement occurs because every member’s contribution comes from his or her unique experiences and perceptions of the world
- Also, because each member chooses to share with the group, we are all enriched

I explain that this exercise is a way that each member of the group can express to one other member of the group what is appreciated about that person and that the group member who

has the ball of yarn can toss it only to someone who has not yet received it. I explain that I will take the first turn myself to demonstrate the process for group members. I generally add that it is often hard to pick just one person to throw the yarn to—part of this exercise is to look around the group and understand and celebrate the gratitude we feel toward many members.

The exercise begins after group members hear the opening remarks and stand in a circle. The process is that the person who holds the ball unwinds part of the yarn, gets a firm grip on that piece of the yarn, and tosses the rest of the ball to someone in the group who is not holding any yarn. Before the toss, the yarn holder says what he appreciates most about the member to whom he has chosen to toss the ball. The person who receives the ball now takes her turn to throw the ball of yarn to a new individual (someone who has not yet had the ball tossed to him or her) and shares what she appreciated about the group member she selected.

In sum, the exercise involves tossing a ball of yarn to someone you appreciate (while you hold onto the string with your other hand), expressing your gratitude, and the recipient, also holding on to the yarn with one hand, tossing the ball on to someone else in the group and expressing gratitude toward that person. The process continues until each person has heard an appreciation and been tossed the ball of yarn.

I like this tool, particularly when the group has worked through dissent and passionate differences of opinion. At the end of the exercise, yarn crisscrosses in many directions to all the individuals around the room, forming a tapestry—and is that not how we work together? We weave a tapestry of meaning that is greater than what any of us can accomplish alone.

## **BRAINSTORMING (HOW TO THINK THINGS UP)**

The term *brainstorming* has become so commonly used to imply any kind of idea generation in a group process that it has its own place in the dictionary:

### **Definition of Brainstorming**

A group problem-solving technique that involves the spontaneous contribution of ideas from all members of the group; also: the mulling over of ideas by one or more individuals in an attempt to devise or find a solution to a problem

—brain•storm verb

—brain•storm•er noun (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, n.d.)

Brainstorming has almost become what Kleenex is to tissue and Jell-O is to wiggly desserts: so common that its own identity has become blurred. Yet brainstorming actually has a structure. It was invented by Alex Osborn in the 1930s at his advertising agency in Buffalo, NY. He called it “how to think up” and first published a book by that title in 1942 (Osborn, 1942). In that book

he first used the term brainstorming. In 1953, after several of his own revisions, he described the technique then known as brainstorming in *Applied Imagination: Principles and Procedures of Creative Problem-Solving* (Osborn, 1953).

Generating ideas is a foundation-level task for group process—ideas that describe a problem, ideas that form solutions to problems, and ideas that form the basis for strategies in achieving those solutions. Osborn proposed a process to address the four basic problems we encounter when groups try idea generation:

- There are too few ideas
- People often are critical of new ideas and that stifles creativity and participation
- People are embarrassed to offer unusual ideas for fear of criticism
- Opportunities to combine ideas into creative solutions are often missed

Osborn said the first task in brainstorming is to focus on the quantity of ideas. He reasoned that the more ideas that are generated, the greater the likelihood that the group will come up with something truly creative.

Second, it is important to withhold criticism of ideas while they are being generated. Group members are asked to enhance or add to the ideas being generated with little regard to their practicality. There will be time in further process to examine, winnow, accept, and reject ideas as the group moves forward.

Third, the group is asked to put aside presumption and welcome new and unusual ideas. It is often the combination of ideas previously thought unrelated that generates creative solutions.

Fourth, group members are encouraged to combine ideas, throwing nothing out but making new ideas out of the mix they are generating.

While there have been many adaptations of the brainstorming technique over the years, these four elements remain the core of a successful exercise.

Here are a few ideas on how to conduct a brainstorming session (or, as we prefer, *thinking things up*):

The facilitative leader either frames a specific question or asks a member of the group to do so. The four principles are explained in the simplest language, something like the following:

We've heard the issue, so now let's brainstorm some ideas on possible solutions (or needs, or problems, or ... etc.). It's important that we get as many ideas into our group process as possible, so I ask you to hold comment on the ideas until later. Any idea is welcome; there are no crazy ideas in brainstorming. Feel free to add to any ideas you are hearing. We're going to write down all of the ideas so we can use them for our work going forward.

If the group is slow to produce ideas, the facilitative leader can offer a few to kick-start the process. Looking at the group's body language to see whether someone wants to offer an idea but may not be so bold is a good idea. Call on that person.

As ideas are generated, the facilitative leader can ask the person offering to clarify them if necessary.

When it seems that all of the ideas have surfaced, the facilitative leader can use another tool, such as a success matrix, to prioritize them.

Ideally, everyone will have a good time thinking things up.

## **CONCURRENT EXPLORING**

### **Procedure**

- Divide your group into subgroups of three to five people.
- Provide the whole group with a task to perform or a question to answer.
- Ask each subgroup to appoint a recorder and a person to present on its behalf.
- Announce a time limit for the subgroup work, allowing enough time to do the task and for each subgroup to report to the whole group. Depending on the complexity of the task or question, a 3- to 5-minute report is usually sufficient.
- Ask the recorder to make clear statements of the subgroup's work on one sheet of flip chart paper. Usually, if a group uses more than one sheet, their report back is likely to be too complicated for consumption by the whole group. Attach the sheets to a wall either near each subgroup or in a cluster at some point in the room.
- Since the subgroups are working concurrently, ask the reporters to focus on any ideas or products that have not been mentioned by a previous group. Depending on the variety of the responses on the sheets, the facilitator can ask each subgroup to report its complete work or one idea at a time. The point is to avoid the last group reporting that it has little or nothing to say because it is redundant.

Working as a whole, the group can do such things as these: pick out commonalities, pick out uncommon items, and/or circle their favorite one (two, etc.). This tool is useful in situations that would benefit from small group discussion and creative energy. It's a good way to keep a group stimulated, because you get to talk more in subgroups. This process also allows individuals who may be shy or reticent to talk in a large group to more actively participate. If the facilitative leader knows that someone who never talks in the large group has volunteered an interesting point or idea, it is a good time to validate that individual's contribution, for example, "Suretta, what a great idea. I never would have thought of it that way." Sometimes folks just need to hear that what they say is valuable and appreciated.

## **CREATIVE THINKING: 1,001 WAYS TO USE A PAPERCLIP**

This tool is the perfect catalyst to create group spirit and full participation early in the group's life together. It is particularly helpful prior to a brainstorming session. Groups that are charged with a task such as problem solving or creating a new program have a challenge: They must avoid oversimplification and, at the same time, avoid becoming so mired in detail that they immobilize themselves. H. L. Mencken (n.d.), satirist, author, and critic of American culture,

once said, "For every complex problem there is an answer that is clear, simple, and wrong." In other words, the group must understand and address the issue in its complexity if they want their solution to work. This tool helps group members move beyond the obvious because, if the obvious solution worked, why would the group have been formed? It also helps members be creative and to think outside the box.

Here are the steps:

1. Seat members in a circle (this is best done without tables or desks)
2. Pass out paperclips so that each member has one
3. Say to the group: "The issue before us requires that we think in new ways, that we work to be as creative as possible, that we become aware that NO idea should be rejected. How do we do that? We practice being creative. Here is your challenge: We are going to identify as many ways as possible that a paperclip can be used. We will take turns, one by one, around the circle. Each idea can be stated only once. If someone makes your suggestion before your turn, think of another way to use the paperclip. Members can say "pass" for a turn if they cannot think of an idea at the moment."
4. Someone volunteers to start, and the rounds continue until no group member can think of another use for a paperclip
5. Discuss with the group what was learned (beyond the 30+ uses for a paperclip): What did it teach about group process and about being open and creative? How can this group use what we learned from the tool to function more effectively?

What happens? Generally, laughter accompanies a number of creative solutions, for example, "You can use the paperclip to shoot spit wads if you have a rubber band." The tool models that all have voice and, more important, all have equal voice. It also models that, when being creative and brainstorming, the generation of ideas is paramount. At a later stage, the group can critically assess the ideas and examine their feasibility, but if the analysis occurs too early, it will stop the process.

## **FEEDBACK LOOPS**

Sometimes, particularly in planning processes, when small work groups are formed they take upon themselves a decision-making role that is not conducive to good group dynamics. While the discussion which takes place in the small group is necessary to productivity, when they come back to the larger group often too much has been said for there to be real comprehension by the rest as to what went on. Then, the larger group accepts the decisions, recommendations, or concepts from the small group as though they represent the will of the larger group.

This is a good opportunity to use "feedback loops":

1. Call a time-out when you feel sufficient discussion has occurred
2. Ask each small group to report briefly on the issues they have discussed, any conclusions that might have been reached, and so on

3. Ask the rest of the people from the other small groups to give them feedback
4. There is no debate allowed
5. Statements from the other group members are begun: "When you talked about ... did you consider ...?" or something similar
6. Each group takes a turn reporting and hearing the feedback
7. They are asked to continue their work, taking into account the feedback they just received

This tool helps to ensure that subgroups do not duplicate the work of other subgroups and to create an opportunity for slower functioning groups to be energized by the work of others.

## **FORCE FIELD ANALYSIS**

Force field analysis is a group problem-solving model developed by social psychologist Kurt Lewin in the 1930s and refined over the next decade (Lewin, 1948, 1951). It was first suggested as a way for a person to address changes in his or her personal life and was later applied to group organization. It has since migrated from social services to business planning, and it remains a valuable tool for groups to address how to achieve outcomes. Here are the basic steps in using a force field analysis in a group setting:

The facilitative leader defines the problem (status quo) for the group. For the purpose of this example, we will use the following problem (simplified, of course):

*Fifty percent of the clients receiving services at our agency are Hispanic; many speak only Spanish. Only twenty percent of the staff of our agency are English-Spanish bilingual. The result is that often we are unable to provide the level of services to our clients as we wish.*

Depending on the information that is already resident in the group on the particular issue, there may be a dialogue at this point to look at supporting data for the problem statement. The problem is then used as a basis to state the outcome that is desired by the group, for example:

*We wish to increase the percentage of bilingual staff in our agency.*

The group uses brainstorming to list as many forces that keep the agency from meeting the outcome (restraining forces):

- *We don't have the money to hire new staff*
- *There are very few bilingual staff available locally with the skills to serve our clients*
- *Adding more bilingual staff could upset our non-Hispanic clients by making our agency seem like it is focused on only one population*

Then the group brainstorms forces that are pushing (driving forces) toward the outcome:

- *Our community is changing, with a large growth in the Hispanic population, and we estimate that the proportion of Hispanic clients in our agency will be nearly seventy-five percent in two years*



## **ICEBREAKERS**

Icebreakers are short tools, usually used at the beginning of a group process, which allow members to introduce themselves and get the process flowing. Sometimes icebreakers have no meaning other than to get people talking and thinking; sometimes, though, they can be very valuable in that they let members share information with the group that will help move the process forward. Here are a few sample icebreakers we like to use.

### **Icebreaker 1: Listening With Intent**

*Since listening intently is a skill of facilitative leadership, here is an icebreaker that allows group members to focus on words.*

Group members divide into twos. If there is an odd number of people in the group, the formal facilitator joins in. The two people sit their chairs back to back, introducing themselves if they don't already know each other. Each person takes turns asking and answering the following questions:

- Where were you born, and how has that shaped who you are today?
- Who was your favorite teacher in school, and why?
- What is your favorite hobby, and why?

When each pair has finished the tool, the large group reconvenes. The formal facilitator asks for volunteers to share something interesting they learned about their partner in the tool. Ask the group for a few comments on how they felt about listening to their partner without seeing them. The process goes on until the group seems energized and ready to move on.

### **Icebreaker 2: Something About Me**

*This icebreaker works best in groups of fewer than 20. For larger gatherings, make subgroups for the tool. This works particularly for groups whose members are very familiar with each other, perhaps providing an opportunity to learn something they didn't know about other members of the group.*

When people enter the room, hand them a small square of paper and ask them to write down (in their best handwriting) something about themselves that others in the meeting probably do not know. They do not put their name on the paper. Then place the papers in hat or jar, or bowl, and so on. Going around the room, have each person draw out a slip of paper and read what it says (if they get their own paper, they should draw again). Then the group tries to guess whom it describes.

### **Icebreaker 3: Getting to Know Me**

*This icebreaker works best for new groups who do not know the facilitative leader who is doing the group process. It works best if the participants are sitting in a semicircle or open-ended U shape.*

Have some 8.5 × 11-inch sheets of cardstock for each member of the group. Each card is folded in half lengthwise. Each person, using colored pens, writes his or her name on one side of the card and draws a symbol of something that helps identify who he or she is. Group members place the nameplates in front of them and introduce themselves to the group.

A variation is that the facilitative leader will physically go to where each person is sitting, ask that person to say his or her name, and then ask what the symbol means. The facilitative leader should ask at least one follow-up question based on the answer about the symbol. This variation allows the facilitative leader and the other group members to make a personal connection at the beginning of the group process. Other group members listen in. It takes a little longer to do this icebreaker than the others, but it often provides rewards in group cohesion later in the process. The nameplate remains throughout the group process, creating an identity through name and symbol for the group member.

### **THE MIRACLE QUESTION**

The miracle question was developed by Peter De Jong and Insoo Kim Berg (2002) as a therapeutic tool in solution-focused therapy. Parallel to the importance of macro practice skills with groups, micro-practice techniques can be a powerful asset in community or organizational work. The miracle question is one such tool. It is particularly helpful for creating a group vision or envisioning positive change. The group works on positive outcomes rather than the simple absence of problems. De Jong and Berg warned that the group often begins “to describe what they want by describing what they do not want” (p. 80). To help the group get on the right track, the facilitative leader may ask, “What would it be like instead, once the problem is solved?”

#### **Procedure**

1. Depending on the size of the group, members may sit at tables in groups of six or eight (e.g., if you have 150 participants), in a single large circle (with 30 participants maximum), or in pairs (as a way to begin to know each other)
2. The facilitative leader says something like:

Imagine that we go home tonight thinking about our work here. We go to sleep and when we wake up tomorrow morning a miracle<sup>1</sup> has happened—the reason that brought us here has been solved. But since we were sleeping when it happened, we don't know that the miracle occurred. When you get up tomorrow morning, what will be different that will let you know that a miracle has happened and our challenge has been solved? (adapted from De Jong & Berg, 2002, p. 85)

3. The facilitative leader has asked the group to think not of the past, or even the present, but to envision a future that has not yet occurred. To help members make this transition, ask future-directed questions—What *would* be different? How *will* you know? What *would* you first notice? What is the first thing others *would* notice?
4. Help the group understand by gently bringing them back, by saying that, rather than being problem focused, the group's dialogue is now *solution focused*. For example: What would need to happen for this new future to occur?
5. Remember, the miracle question is the beginning. It is not the solution. Instead, it is an idea of future change that can result from the group's solution. It is a positive catalyst created by the group, for the group. Now the group can focus on developing the related questions to lead its actions toward the positive future they envisioned.

De Jong and Berg (2002) explained that the miracle question helps individuals (and, we believe, groups) work through a process that takes them from an idea to reality. At first, the idea is general, but with thought it becomes more developed and clear. Components of the idea and goals are developed. Consideration moves to how to accomplish the idea, which becomes even more appealing. Often, resources are insufficient to accomplish the "Cadillac" version, but different versions of the vision and how to accomplish it lead to acknowledgment of the amount of work needed. The group commits to the project and amount of work. Ultimately, the idea becomes reality.

### **NAMEPLATE EXERCISE**

Liz developed this exercise when she worked for the Nevada Division of Child and Family Services (DCFS). The Nevada government is quite frugal, and DCFS was spread among five converted cottages on a campus that formerly comprised the Nevada State Children's home. The paradigm of how to best raise orphaned children changed from placing them in institutions to living with real foster families. So, cottages that had once housed children were refitted to become offices. Coordinating administrative activities among five separate cottages was a challenge. For example, the head office controlled the telephone system for the whole campus and, as a public agency, it was critical that telephones were consistently staffed during business hours, calls were transferred to the correct building and office, and phone messages were delivered and tracked accurately. Seventeen administrative assistants worked among the five buildings and completed not only their own job-related tasks, many of which were highly complex and prescribed through state or federal law, but also were assigned shared agency-wide responsibilities. On a rotating basis, workers had to take their work to the main building when someone was ill or to ensure phone coverage during breaks and lunch hours. If Worker A was covering phones and Worker B was five or ten minutes late, then Worker A could not leave, which eroded her lunch break. Special instructions often were not communicated to the next person taking a shift at the phones. In fact, general communication among workers spread throughout the five buildings was challenging. And workers resented having to leave their buildings and their own desks where they had access to the records and tools they needed for their regular job duties. Susan Ballew, one of the most brilliant and thoughtful managers we

know, pulled the administrative staff together for a one-day workshop to create a more proactive team and find solutions to some of the scheduling and communication challenges. She asked Liz to begin the day, and Liz conducted the nameplate exercise described next.

1. Everyone is invited to sit around a large conference table (we constructed one by putting together six 4 × 8-inch tables—two rows of three). Copier paper is passed around, one page per person, and dozens of colored magic markers are placed on the table's surface.
2. Opening remarks include something like the following: "Everyone here knows each other's names, but that is different than knowing the person. Today, we hope to get to know each other better and work as a team to make all our work lives and DCFS function a little more smoothly. Since some of us have worked here less than a year and we work in five different buildings around the campus, I'd like to start by creating nameplates. Please take a piece of paper, fold it into thirds, and write your name. You can see there are many colors of markers on the table, please use as many as you want."
3. Give a little time, don't rush people. Make your own nameplate. Folded into thirds, the paper makes two sides and a base. When everyone is finished, invite the group to look around the room at all the other nameplates. Point out that no two are alike—interesting, given that everyone received exactly the same instructions. Each of us is unique with a unique personality, and we bring that personality and our unique ways of seeing the world to any task we do.
4. Point out several of your observations. Have fun with this. I recall some observations of the wonderful Nevada group, including: an individual who drew a multi-colored border and three-dimensional letters, the person who used six colors and put happy faces in the corners, the woman who entwined flowers around the letters of her name, the person who used one color (black) and finished in five seconds, the person who wrote her first and last name, the person who wrote her name on two sides—the side that faced outward and the side that faced herself. Ask members to examine nameplates and share something that caught their attention.
5. Ask the group what they think the purpose of the exercise was. Generally, someone will suggest that the reason was to illustrate differences. Acknowledge everything that is volunteered. Then point out that each group member's style and personality has strengths—the person who immediately and efficiently goes straight to the bottom line, the person who is detailed (first and last name), the creative individual who turns each letter into a work of art, and so on.
6. Close by saying that all their personalities and styles bring different strengths and perspectives to the day's tasks and that if they listen to each other, share their own ideas, look for commonalities, and are willing to compromise, they are equal to any challenge.

## **PLUSES AND WISHES**

"Pluses and wishes" sounds better than "pros and cons," but it means pretty much the same thing. It's a reasonably quick way to do a meeting evaluation.

For some meetings, such as workshops, written evaluations at the end of the process may be helpful. However, people are usually too tired to fill them out, and only those who really hated the workshop or those who really loved it are likely to. The pluses and wishes matrix gives the group a simple process to wrap up a meeting with an evaluation that is positive in all aspects.

The pluses are those things that most people liked, and you will usually get at least a nonverbal consensus on them. The wishes are those things that people didn't like so much and wish could have been better. If a meal was served, don't be surprised if someone always says the food could have been better. If they don't, no one was paying attention. Including a section on "process suggestions" allows everyone to comment on the construct of the meeting and is instructive for all. Sending along the list with meeting notes is a good way of reminding everyone that it was a full process and there was participation from beginning to end and reminds the facilitative leader that no detail is too small to influence a successful meeting.

Create a simple diagram on flip chart paper that looks something like this:

PLUSES	WISHES
SUGGESTIONS	

Ask the group, in random sharing format, to offer comments. Confirm whether the comment is a plus or a wish. Write them down on the flip chart until you feel that a fair balance of comments has been recorded.

Ask members of the group for suggestions on how the meeting could have been approved. Record the comments.

If you choose to not use the pluses and wishes matrix, then you can do a simple group evaluation using a gentle, questioning manner such as:

- What were our goals for this meeting? *Ask for persons to volunteer at least a few of the goals. Write them down on flip chart paper.*
- How many of you feel these goals were accomplished? No? *Ask for a show of hands. Call on a representative number of those who voted yes and no. Write down their responses on the flip chart paper.*
- What could we have done to better accomplish our goals? *Call on a few people and write down the responses.*
- Thank people for their participation.

## ROTATING ROUNDS

### Procedure

Give the group members a task or question to work on individually. It is usually best to ask for two or three issues to record. For example, "Please list three qualities social workers should have to be effective facilitative leaders." Have each person report one idea at a time until everyone has shared all their ideas. Avoid duplication by asking each person to share only ideas that have not been mentioned. If the purpose of this tool is just to get a conversation going, then verbalizing the ideas should be enough. If the ideas will be needed to form the basis for ongoing conversations, it is best to have one or two people recording them for the whole group to see.

A variation on this process is to have people record their ideas on 3 × 5-inch sticky notes and then place them on a wall (flip chart, whiteboard, etc.). Ask each person to put his or her name at the bottom of each idea, one idea per sticky note. Ask the whole group (works best if there are 20 or less in the group) to come to the wall and put their sticky note in an appropriate category. For the above question those categories might include things like communication skills, listening, observation, and personal hygiene (okay, maybe not that last one). This process allows participants to take part in a group decision process that is much faster than considering one idea at a time. It also makes people have to get up and move around. That can be a very good thing for any group process in which people have been static for a while. Having the names on the notes allows the facilitative leader to ask for some clarity from the person regarding the idea itself or the category.

## SAMPLE AGENDA

Because the meeting agenda is the reflection of various factors involving a group's process, including the purpose, size, composition, time, and so on, there can be no one or two sample agendas that can be universally applied. That said, here is one sample for a planning meeting which includes some of the elements we have discussed in *Facilitative Leadership in Social Work Practice*:

### Agenda

*Getting to Know Each Other: Icebreaker*

*Introductions and Expectations:* Full-group exercise in which each person briefly shares what they wish as outcomes for the session

*Agenda Review:* Exploring the process in light of the group's expectations

*Framing the Dialogue:* Mary will share her findings verbally and in writing as a framework for the group's conversation

*Creating the Success Matrix:* Full-group exercise in which three categories of program activities are listed and discussed for relevance

- What we need to do (those activities driven by current and near-future funding)
- What we want to do (those activities which meet the personal desires of staff)

- What we should do (those activities which are driven by our perceived need of our target populations)

*Small Group Work:* Three work groups will each examine a section of the matrix. Participants are randomly assigned to the groups.

- What are potential funding sources for each program activity?
- Who else do we need to be involved in our planning and resource development?
- What are the value-added activities for which we might seek funding?

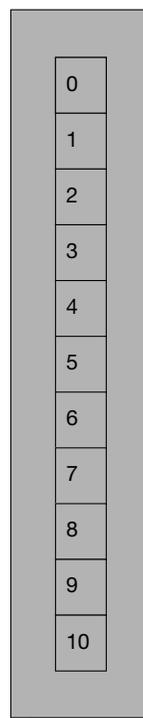
*Report Back:* Full-group sharing

*Next Steps*

*Evaluation:* A pluses-and-wishes exercise

## SCALING

Scaling is a technique borrowed from solution-focused therapy, a therapeutic approach that, as mentioned earlier, was developed by De Jong and Berg (2002). Originally designed for work with individuals, scaling is an exciting tool to use with groups. Simply put, scaling asks the group to put their “observations, impressions, and predictions” on a scale from 0 to 10 (De Jong & Berg, 2002, p. 108).



Scaling is a quick way to reflect people's stances on complex issues. Its flexibility lends itself to all sorts of questions and issues, and scaling can address serious and fun concerns and strengths. Here are a few examples:

- On a scale from 0 to 10, with 0 meaning no match and 10 meaning a perfect match, how well do the skills of our agency staff match the needs of our clients?
- On a scale from 0 to 10, with 0 meaning of no importance and 10 meaning extremely important, how would you rate the importance of this issue to quality of life in our community?
- On a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 reflecting no interest and 10 reflecting extreme interest, how would you rate your desire to be part of the solution?
- On a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 reflecting that you are laid back and stress free and 10 reflecting that you are totally stressed out, where are you at this point in the semester (for students—or faculty, for that matter)?
- On a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 reflecting no confidence at all and 10 reflecting total confidence, how confident are you that we are on the right track with our work to date?

Step 1: With groups, we like to create the 0-to-10 scale on the floor down one side of the room, then ask members to go stand by the number that represents their answer to the question. This gets members up and moving around and it makes visible, at a glance, how everyone in the group rated the particular issue being considered.

Step 2: The facilitative leader then asks for volunteers to share the reasons they rated the issue or question as they did. If people are reluctant to volunteer, the facilitative leader walks up and down the scale and asks people at different points to share why they chose that number. This sharing is an important step because it allows the group to hear multiple perceptions and opinions about the issue at hand. Don't rush this part. Ask members to clarify or explain, if necessary. Affirm differences in responses and let the group know that their multiple experiences and ways of viewing the world strengthen the group.

Step 3: If there is modal response (a significant percentage of the group is clustered around one number or a couple of consecutive numbers), draw that information to the group's attention. For example, "Our members selected scores from 2 to 7, but it looks like about half the group is around 5 or 6." The group may be bimodal, that is, two large groupings exist. Whatever the spread is, articulate that information to the group. The range and grouping of selected numbers reveal how divergent group members' opinions are.

Step 4: The first three steps are important in their own right, but Step 4 focuses the group on positive change. The facilitative leader asks, "What would move this issue up two points? If you are at 5, what needs to happen to move us to 7?" (or "up one point?" or "to a 10?"). Asking members to assess what would realistically move the group forward allows them to focus on small or large steps and helps to avoid participants becoming overwhelmed by the magnitude of the issue or responsibility. This step can also be used to identify a number of next steps, which the members can then assess and use one of the prioritizing tools to decide their next course of action.

## **SEQUENCED SHARING**

This is a good tool to use if you anticipate that a moderately high level of conflict will exist when the group discusses a particular topic. Taking turns in giving responses limits the opportunity for cross-talk or objections by other group members. This tool is also good when the majority of group members share the same general opinion, or when quieter members are being pushed out of the discussion or reluctant to participate. There is nothing like being put on the spot to generate some creative responses.

As with the other idea-generating exercises (e.g., brainstorming), the facilitative leader poses the question. Ask the group members to each write down their responses on paper. Then, group members are asked to share their thoughts from the paper one at a time, starting at one end of the room and working toward the other end. People are allowed to pass. Individuals can be asked to elaborate on their comments. Record the responses and repeat the process until members have finished their input. The facilitative leader can summarize at the end of each round.

One way to add anonymity to this process is for the facilitative leader to gather up all the written comments, then randomly pass them back out. Each member then reads what another member has written. Sometimes the anonymity results in more honesty or risk taking because participants do not know who the author is. This variation can also be done early in a group's life, when trust has not yet been established. Discussion can occur after all comments have been read and recorded, or a small group discussion can occur when a member is moved to add to the thoughts that were just read.

## **SUCCESS MATRIX**

Another variation on idea-generation tools is the success matrix. This tool allows the group to prioritize ideas as they are proposing them.

Begin by posing the question. It may be something like "How can we raise new funds for the youth program?"

Have ready some suggestions to the group on helpful criteria for success for the particular question. For the above question some criteria might be:

1. How much do we need for the program to be successful?
2. Who are our current supporters of this or like programs?
3. Who are possible new donors?
4. What do we need to demonstrate the value of the program?
5. How can we approach the current and new potential donors?

At this point, use brainstorming to generate as many ideas as possible without debating them. As the ideas are proposed, place them in the proper categories—such as the five criteria just listed. Note: You may need a category called "Other" for ideas that do not fit one of your designated groupings.

Once the ideas are recorded in the various categories, a process of looking for similar statements or duplicates can winnow the list down to a few ideas in each category. That information can then flow to a planning process matrix.

This process can be done with a group as a whole (usually fewer than 15 persons) or in small subgroups and reported to the whole group.

Next, sort the ideas from each question into a success matrix using simple criteria. Some suggestions for the above questions could be:

- Criterion 1: Easiest to accomplish
- Criterion 2: Lowest cost
- Criterion 3: Quickest to do
- Criterion 4: Highest possibility of success

Create a matrix for the whole group to see that looks something like this

	CRITERION 1	CRITERION 2	CRITERION 3	CRITERION 4
OPTION A				
OPTION B				
OPTION C				
OPTION D				

The option that meets the most criteria should be the first to try, the second should be tried next, and so on. This tool can be valuable when a visible tool is needed for group members to see choices rather than just hear them.

## **SWOC (FORMERLY KNOWN AS SWOT) FOR FACILITATIVE LEADERS**

### **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Challenges**

SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) was developed for the Stanford Research Institute by Albert Humphrey (2005) as the result of a research project in the 1960s to assist business with issues in strategic planning. The primary focus of the tool was to evaluate current and future status as a foundation for the planning process. It was based on four questions:

- What are the key assets we have in our organization?
- Where are we weak and need improvement?
- What trends or opportunities are open to us?
- What trends or competition do we have that can harm us?

Once lists were generated in the planning process as answers to the above questions, strategies were developed to preserve the assets, address the weaknesses, seize the opportunities, and avoid the threats.

We've adapted the SWOT model to the theme of *Facilitative Leadership in Social Work Practice* as a tool that facilitative leaders can use for finding solutions to social work related problems. We've changed the T (threats) to a C (challenges) to connote a less violent and more progressive model. The tool itself is rather simple:

Select a particular issue on which the group wishes to act. Using brainstorming, ask the group to generate lists in each of the four categories. Once the lists have been made, ask the group to prioritize the lists within each group by assigning numbers (1 through however many ideas were on the list). A fun way is to have members write a number on a small sticky note and go to the list written on a pad or whiteboard and place their note there. Then the facilitative leader can identify the rank. Here are some ways to phrase the questions:

- What do we currently have within our agency or organization which is an asset that can be used on this issue? What is our greatest asset?
- What limits our group's ability to make solutions work on this issue? What is our greatest weakness?
- What can we identify as possible new resources for us to address this issue? What is the best resource?
- If we move forward, what pitfalls or problems may impede our progress? What is our greatest challenge?

Once this part of the tool is completed, the group can divide into subgroups and work on each set of questions and come back to the group for action.

## **TURNING OFF THE VOLUME**

The facilitative leader poses a question to the group.

Ask members to think about their response for a minute or two, in silence, and to write down their responses without discussion.

Ask for the responses and record them.

This tool allows for reflective thinkers to be put on an equal basis with the extroverted thinkers and allows for some peaceful silence to follow what might have been a chaotic moment in the group.

## **NOTE**

1. Using the term *miracle* may not be culturally sensitive or appropriate, depending on the composition of your group. You may want to use "something magical happened" or "your dream came true" or another phrase. The point is, you don't want the group to get hung up on the words and miss the experience.

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