

# Managing Difficult Meetings 'Dig-Outs'

## Suggestions for interventions at critical points

*The following are a sample of interventions that can be deployed at specific moments in a 'difficult meeting'...*

**Pre-meeting:** for internal or external meetings, it is always wise to check in with as many participants as possible before the formal meeting session itself especially if the work with this group is going to be over a significant period of time. This is even more essential in managing a difficult conversation between two or more individuals.

**Purpose:** Take plenty of time clarifying and getting buy-in to the specific purpose of the meeting – especially if it is a group (internal or external) that you will have to do a lot with. Return to this purpose as a way to refocus the group and in particular an individual who is taking the group in a different direction. At times you may need to re-negotiate the purpose if the full group want to do this – be clear on your role in the meeting – chair...ideas person...driving the issues...summarising...leader...

**Hogging:** "I'm sorry to interrupt you, but there is a lot in what you are saying and I just need to make sure I am getting it..." then summarise their contribution briefly and move to on others in the meeting by saying... "I know you have more to say and I will get back to you but I want to bring some of the others in for a bit...is that ok?"

**Reframing:** The importance of summarising constructively what the participants are saying especially at 'fraught' moments. Ensure, in sensitive sessions, to use reframing/summarising a lot to allow the most constructive but true elements of the contributions to get heard.

**Conflict Mountain:** when facilitating two or more around a difficulty or interpersonal issues, it is important to first of all make a judgement as to whether this approach has some good chance to contribute rather than to compound the problem. In such a session, it is important to be able to allow respectful 'venting' while always remembering the importance of you as managing the meeting constructively summarising and reframing between each contribution – they will have to climb the metaphorical 'conflict mountain' and get somewhat 'exhausted' with venting before they make some progress. Remember the **Four F's**© – Feel, Fact, Frame and Fix it...

**Capture the Gesture:** as chair, team leader... watch out carefully for constructive gestures – affirmation, acknowledgements, partial apologies etc – your job is, when you judge them genuine, to 'amplify' them to assist with credible progress.

**Summarise:** if in doubt summarise – this will give you and the group time to reflect where the process has got to ... are they ready to move on or whether there is more to do with the stage they are at...

**Internal meetings:** all the more important to clarify role so that confusion is not created in your team. Hold such meetings in a different venue, with a different room layout...check in with participants if this approach is working, have someone who will give you genuine and relevant feedback...otherwise all the tools and tips are equally applicable

Keep adding to your own toolbox of strategies and tips...practice wherever you can the skills whether you are formally facilitating or not, these skills can be very helpful in your professional context ... never mind your personal one...!