ENGAGING COMMUNICATIONS

Leading Excellence

HOW TO FACILITATE
A LEADERS GUIDE

FACILITATOR GUIDE

This resource has been created to help leaders make the shift to become effective facilitators so that you can feel confident that your workshops and team discussions are engaging and productive for all involved.

A good facilitator is creative, curious and inclusive. This guide offers tips and approaches for you to take and adapt for yourself.

In this pack, you will find:

- Role of a Facilitator
- Meeting Leader vs Facilitator
- Questioning techniques
- Example questions
- Tips for handling difficult dynamics

THE ROLE OF FACILITATOR

Facilitation is leadership in action. It means motivating, guiding and supporting others in developing ideas and processes that produce continuous improvement and audience engagement. There is one large selling point for learning facilitation skills: you don't need to memorise anything, you don't need to be the centre of attention, you don't need slides, and you don't need to be an expert or claim expertise in a subject. Essentially, as a facilitator, your job is to get the audience to consider, discuss and reflect on the points in the agenda. Ideally, you guide rather than lead the conversation to ensure maximum value is extracted from the room's potential.

Good facilitation rapidly creates engagement because the audience feels they are driving the conversation, and a powerful facilitator can potentially achieve even higher levels of engagement and participation than the charismatic extrovert who uses lots of high-energy showmanship.

The facilitator's role is quite different from that of the traditional meeting leader, and this difference often catches managers out. A manager might claim to 'facilitate' a meeting, but in reality, they may do little true facilitation.

UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENCES

The table below highlights the differences between the roles of facilitator and leader:

Meeting Leader	Facilitator
Focus on their own needs or departmental objectives and see the group as supporting them	Focus on the needs and objectives of the group and see their role as supporting the group
Concentrate on the content of the discussion	Concentrate on the process of the session to maximise the effectiveness of everyone's contribution
Believe that they are the experts and know best, therefore do a lot of telling	Believe that the group members are the experts and therefore do a lot of listening
Ask few questions and any questions asked are typically closed or leading questions, seeking specific factual information leading the group to a particular answer	Use open and probing questions to explore issues transparently
Strive to put forward their own ideas and work towards a solution they would want	Coach and support the group to develop ideas and solutions which are best supported by the group, as well as being practical for the organisation
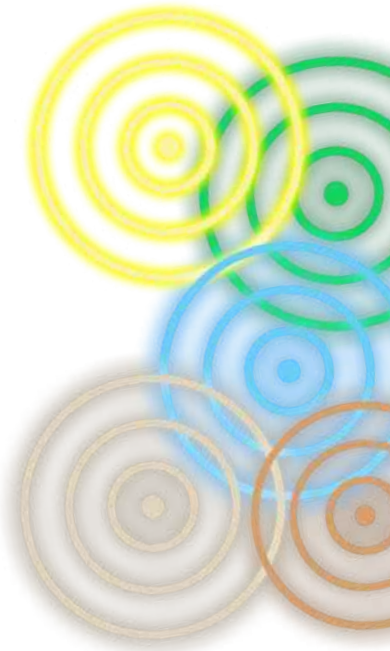
QUESTIONING TECHNIQUES

The nature of your questions will determine the response.

Questions also establish the rapport between you and the person being questioned. You should choose the type of question to get the desired results.
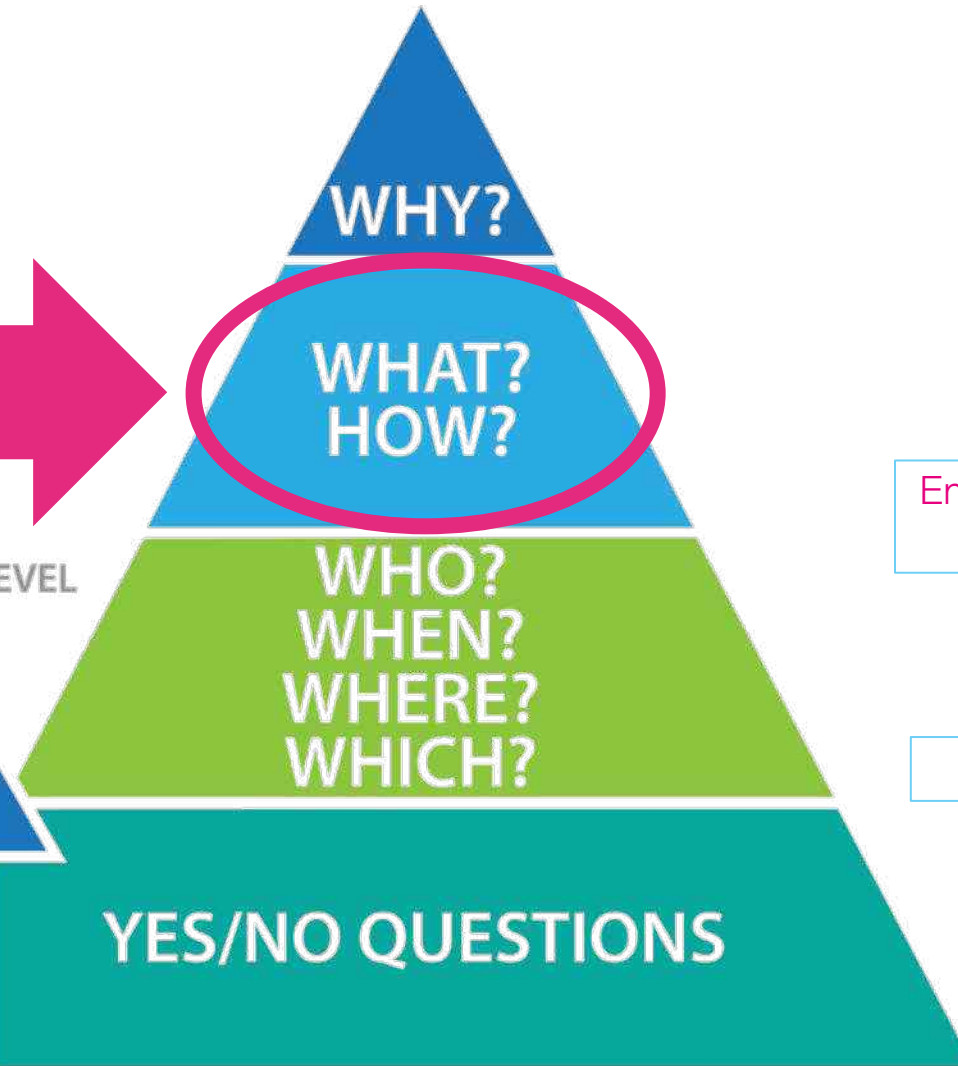
BAD QUESTIONS ⊗

DID
DOES
HAVE
HAS
ARE
IS
CAN

GOOD QUESTIONS ✓

WHAT
WHICH
WHERE
WHEN
WHO
HOW
WHY*
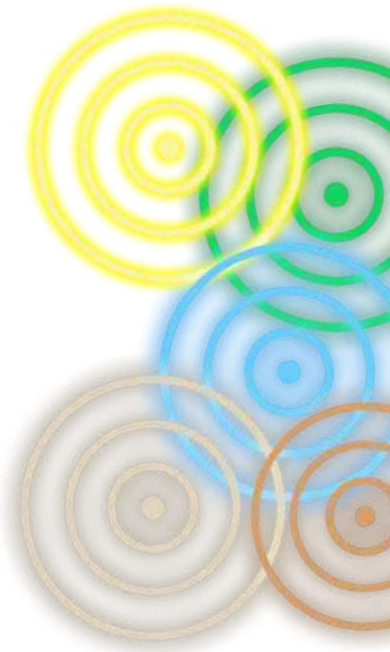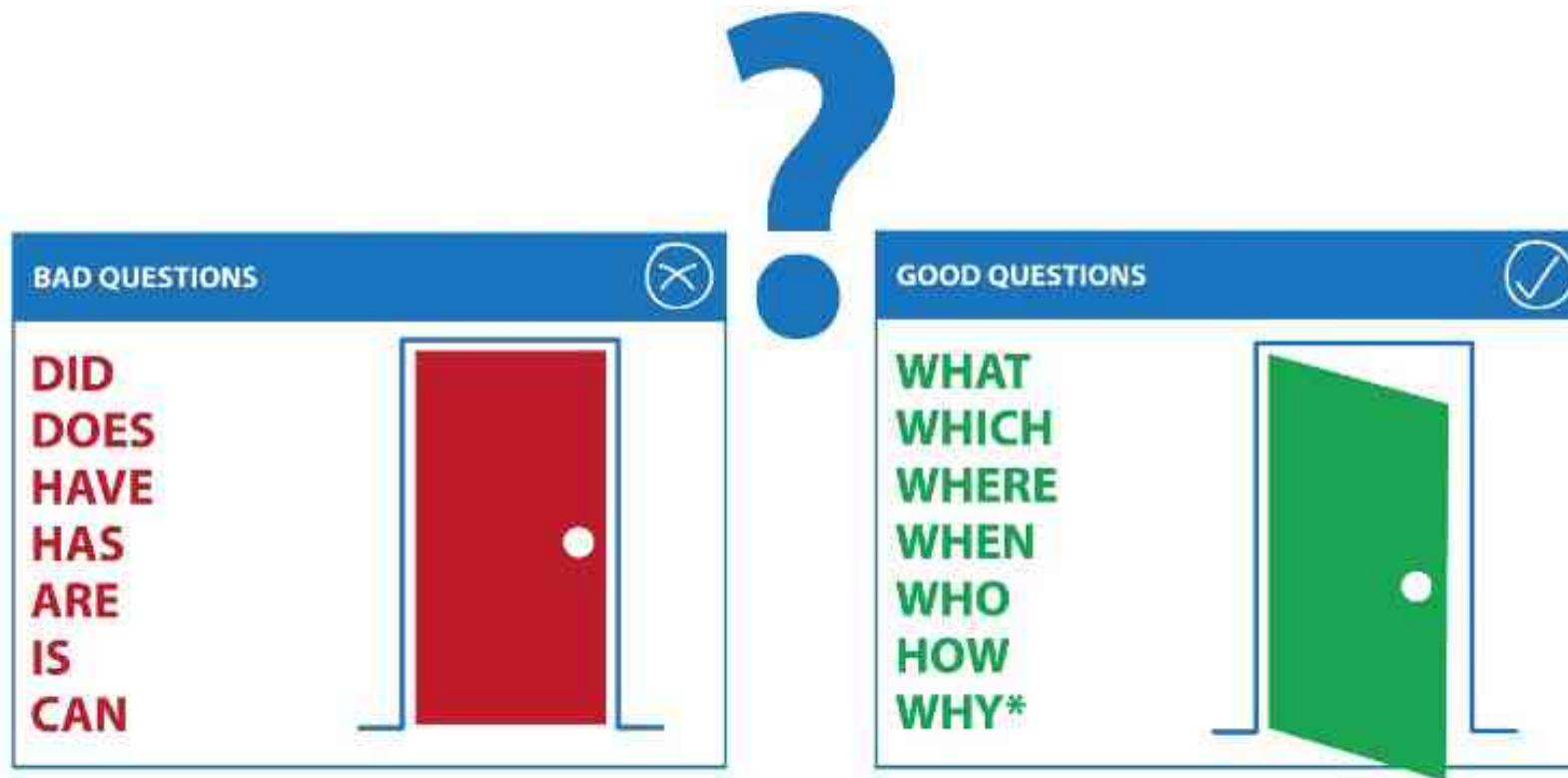
QUESTION PYRAMID

Not all questions are created equal, but each serves a distinct purpose.

THE 'SWEET SPOT'

CHALLENGE LEVEL

WHY?

WHAT?
HOW?

WHO?
WHEN?
WHERE?
WHICH?
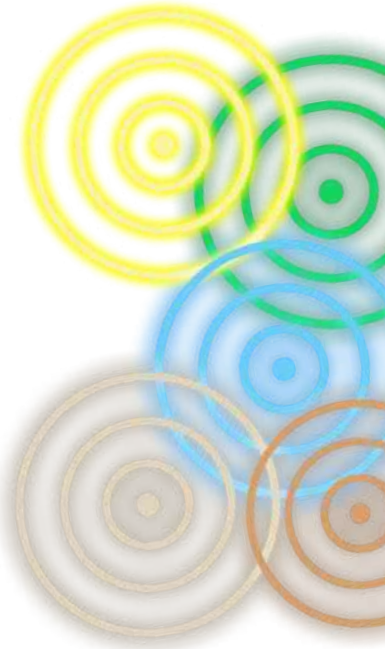
YES/NO QUESTIONS

Beliefs and values.

The deepest level – need earn the right to ask, or you risk an ego reaction

Opinions and conjecture.

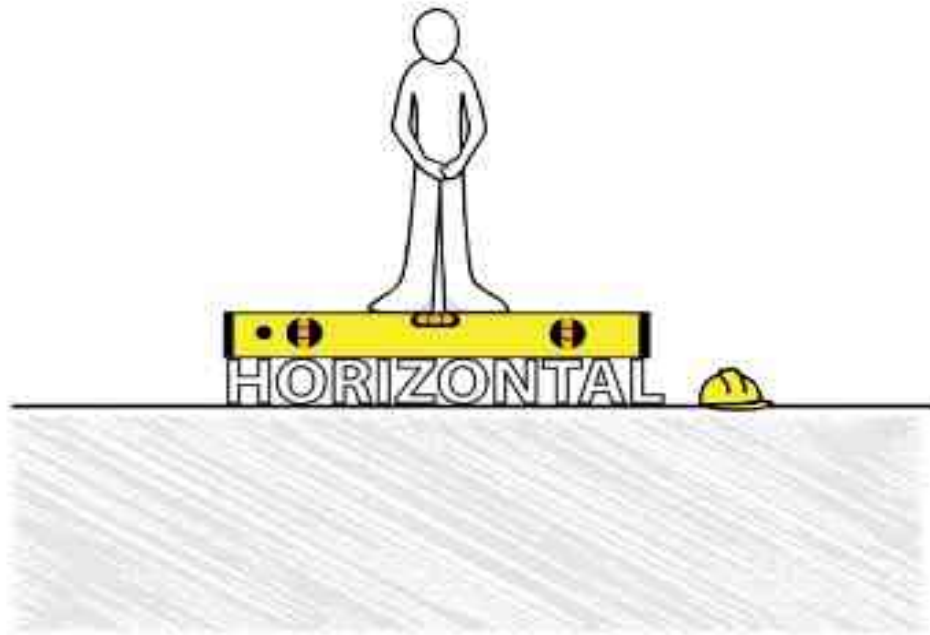Encourages deeper thinking & reflection

Facts and information.

Easy recall, surface level
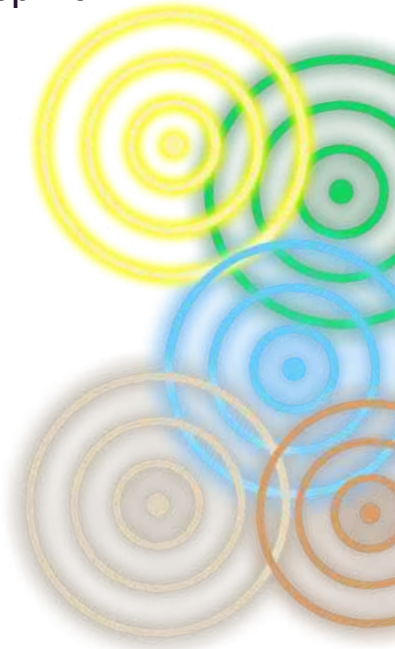
QUESTION TECHNIQUES

Focused more widely, useful for fact and data gathering.

"What are the steps in the {x} process?"

Good for getting input from a specific person or team

"Clearly this topic impacts Production, Alex, what's your opinion?"

HORIZONTAL

Spotlight

QUESTION TECHNIQUES

**Gathers more detailed insight from across the group
Helpful to draw out differing examples or opinions
ready for deeper exploration**

"What are some of the examples you've seen?"
"Who would like to share an example?"
"What other experiences have people had?"
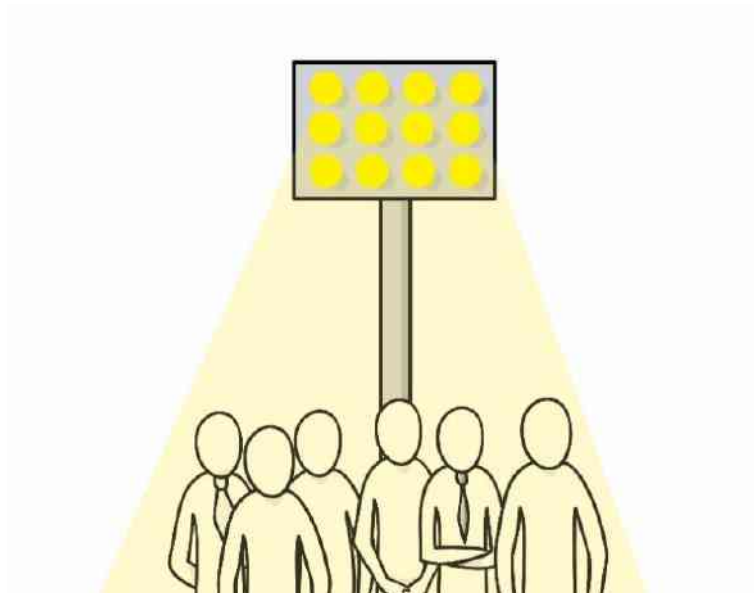
**Explores a specific topic or person's experience more
deeply.**

"Mary, you mentioned [X] tell us more about that"
"Clearly this topic impacts Production, Alex, what's been the
impact of this, for you?"
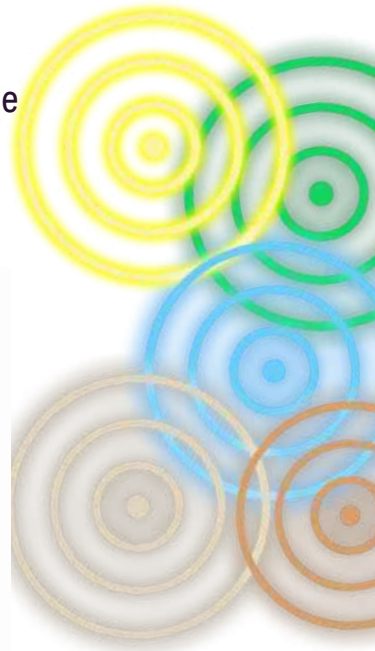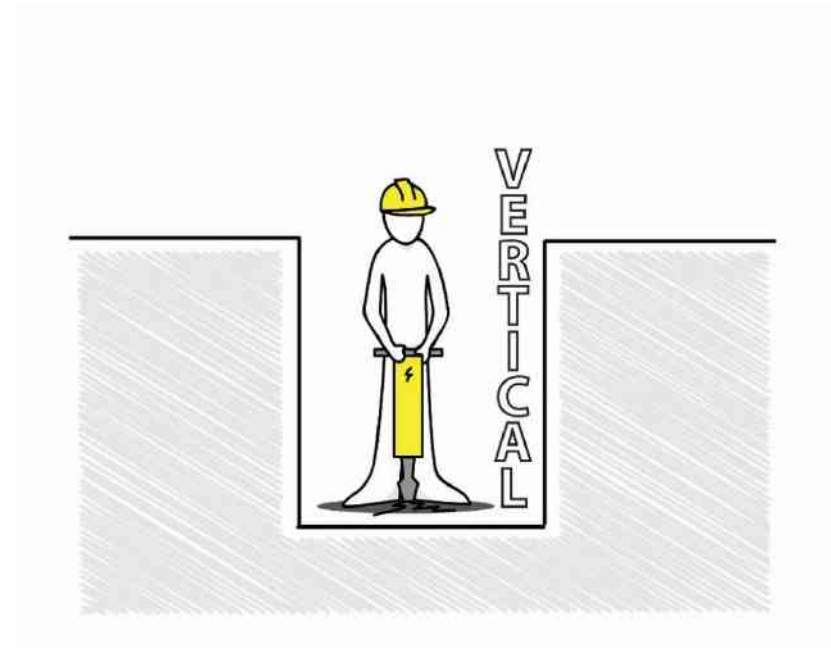
EXAMPLE QUESTIONS TO - SUPPORT LEARNING

Good for stimulating thinking and deepening understanding. The team learns from answering the question.

- What aspects of the situation challenge you?
- What excites you?
- What do you see as the critical elements?
- How does this fit in with the priorities?
- What is the aim of this discussion?

EXAMPLE QUESTIONS TO – ENCOURAGE EXPLORATION

Open-ended questions that require more depth and reflection. They prompt the group to discover new and creative ideas:

- What would that give you?
- What stands out?
- How would you frame the underlying problem?
- How would you define the task?
- How else could you look at this situation?

EXAMPLE QUESTIONS TO – CONSIDER OUTCOMES

These questions shift the perspective from problems to solutions. They help the team determine and define objectives.

- How would that look in X months/years from now?
- What would be the ideal way to set this up?
- What does success look like?
- What would someone who handles this kind of issue do?
- If you had total control and resources, what might you try?
- What are the costs/ benefits of each of these ideas?
- What if you could start again?
- What should we do?

EXAMPLE QUESTIONS TO – ENGAGE TEAM MEMBERS

These questions are used to motivate or connect on a personal level. They help the team to understand emotional responses.

- What is it about this that concerns/motivates you?
- What makes this important to you right now?
- How do you feel about this?
- How much control do you have over the situation?
- At your best, what do you bring to this situation?
- What happens to you and others involved if things are not going well?
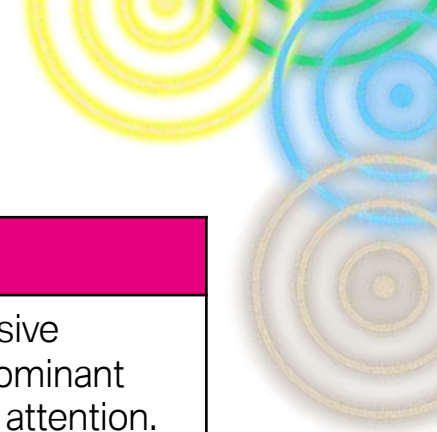- What is holding you back from a way forward?

EXAMPLE QUESTIONS TO – ENCOURAGE COMMITMENT OR ACTION

Questions that help the team to move toward change and become accountable.

- What option(s) do you choose to take action on?
- When are you going to start and finish your actions?
- What could hinder you in taking these steps?
- What will you do to eliminate these factors?
- What support do you need, and who do you need it from?
- What personal resistance do you have towards taking these steps?
- How will you deal with internal and external factors?

DEALING WITH DIFFICULT DYNAMICS

Challenge	Instead of…	Try this …
Highly vocal member of the group is dominating discussion	… trying to control this person	… focus your efforts on the passive majority. Trying to change the dominant person simply gives them more attention. … give them the flipchart pen and ask them to write the notes for you so they feel useful and have something else to focus on
Messing about in the middle of a discussion	… trying to organise people or getting into a power struggle with them	… aim for a break as soon as possible. People become undisciplined when they are overloaded or worn out. After a break, they usually return refreshed and are better able to focus.
Low participation by the entire group	… assuming everything is moving easily and taking their silence as their consent	… switch it up by breaking up the collective into smaller groups for discussions. This can feel safer for the individuals and also means people can't "hide" in the mass as easily.
Two people have a collision of opinions	… trying to resolve the conflict (Remember, some people use others as sparring partners to help them clarify ideas or solidify their own thinking)	… honour the contributions and reach out to the wider group e.g "Who else has a different opinion on this topic?" Refocus your energy on re-engaging the passive majority

DEALING WITH DIFFICULT DYNAMICS

Challenge	Instead of…	Try this …
Failure to start and end on time	… waiting for the "people who count" to arrive before you start, or running over time	… start when you say you will (waiting only encourages lateness) and if you must run over time then ensure you have consent from the group to do so. … if time management becomes a recurrent them for you, improve your agenda planning.
Someone becomes strident and repetitive	… confronting them at break, or talking behind their back	… recognise that people repeat themselves if they don't feel they are being listened to. Summarise their point of view until they feel understood
Someone discovers a new problem that no-one had previously considered	… trying to come up with reasons why the group should not focus on this new issue, or pretend not to hear the comments	… celebrate, this could be the insight you've been looking for!

Don't take things personally; the session is about them, not you! If there is a challenge, then there is also engagement. People challenge when they feel passionate about something. You are the vehicle for this passion, not the target.