Facilitating Large Group Meetings That Get Results Every Time

By

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INTRODUCTION

Large group meetings can be powerful accelerators when an organization or community wants to: 1) build alignment, 2) deploy strategy, 3) get work done (budget planning, project management, exchanges of practice, etc.), 4) accelerate the way work gets done in communities and organizations, or 5) accelerate and deepen organizational transformation.

At the same time, facilitating groups of 100 or more participants can seem a daunting task. This chapter presents 10 principles for the design and facilitation of large group meetings based on our twenty years experience designing and facilitating large group meetings in all sizes and types of organizations and communities around the world. By applying these ten principles, the large group facilitator will feel more confident that the meeting will achieve its intended results. In addition, participants will leave energized to act because their voices were heard, they acted wisely, and they saw the meeting as worthwhile for themselves and for the group as a whole.

This chapter begins by describing the planning team process which is a key ingredient of our practice and underlies each principle. Then we describe each of the ten principles and offer tips for practicing the principles that help move the facilitator's experience from "daunting task" to energizing and rewarding work.

THE PLANNING TEAM PROCESS

The meeting participants and sponsor are the best sources to ensure that the meeting has clear purpose and outcomes, the right participants, and the right conversations and activities to accomplish the meeting's purpose. Throughout the planning and facilitation of the large group meeting we work with a planning team that is a microcosm of the whole group that will participate in the meeting. This microcosm represents the diverse levels, roles, locations, experiences, viewpoints, attitudes (especially the cynics and skeptics), and cultures that characterize the meeting participants. The size of a planning team can vary from six to 25, as long as it's representative. This planning team works together to ensure that the large group meeting produces the results that the organization needs to achieve.

Our experience is that the process of working with a planning team ensures success by creating participation, meeting ownership, predictibility that the meeting agenda will lead to the desired outcomes, and energy [not only for the planning team members, but for all participants] around the large group meeting and the actions that come out of it.

In working with planning teams, we have learned to consider the following:

- Facilitate a design meeting with the planning team, up to two days in duration, to clarify the purpose and outcomes of the large group meeting and create the actual agenda.
- During the planning meeting, include the quiet voices and the voices of the fringe. These fringe voices make valuable contributions because they espouse views that are controversial, and help break paradigms and make the "undiscussable," discussable. When they believe the agenda for the meeting will really work, there's a high probability that it will!
- Build the microcosm as a team. Help them to create a shared picture by first listening to each other for understanding, honoring that "each person's truth is true."
- After the design meeting, develop a detailed design including logistics, specific task assignments, and related handouts.

Review the detailed design with the planning team and revise as needed.

- Some organizations are so resource constrained that they will not give up people for two whole days. Nonetheless, find creative ways to use whatever time you do have to combine the microcosm's thinking and inform the design.
- If you cannot sit down with a planning team that truly represents the organization in a microcosm, do the best you can. Repeatedly ask the group questions like, "If the people from 'such & such' were here, what would they be saying?" The group often does a-good job of representing the perspectives of those not present.

The flow of the planning meeting moves like an accordion. The meeting starts with gathering as much data as possible to allow the team to create a common database that reflects the richness of all their perspectives. Then the meeting narrows to agree on a specific purpose for the session being planned, expands again to identify all the possible "chunks of the agenda;" and narrows again to specify next steps needed to pull off a successful meeting.

The planning team process is a key ingredient and underlies each of the 10 principles for design and facilitation of large group meetings. Now, let's examine each of these principles.

TEN PRINCIPLES AND THEIR PRACTICE

Principle 1: Develop a compelling purpose statement to guide the meeting design

A fundamental design principle that contributes greatly to the success of large group meeting facilitation is having a compelling statement of purpose for the meeting. This statement not only reflects the interests of the diverse stakeholders who will be attending the meeting but conveys an optimistic prediction about the result of bringing these stakeholders together for conversations that "unleash widespread creativity and inspire new levels of motivation" (Gerard and Ellinor, 2001). Without a clear and succinct purpose statement, we find that it is almost impossible to create an intentional design for the right conversations and activities.

Developing a compelling purpose statement is a generative process involving the exploration of a wide range of possibilities for addressing complex and sometimes controversial issues. First the planning team members work together to surface different perspectives and interests of the groups they represent and offer their own desires for the future. With data coming from many sources to inform the team, the facilitator's challenge is to enable the planning team members to see the interconnectedness among diverse perspectives and create shared meaning. Based on the results of this discussion, the planning team is ready to agree on the meeting outcomes. As a microcosm of all the participants who will attend the large group meeting, these outcomes will reflect the interests of the whole group.

Once the planning team has agreed on the desired outcomes for the meeting, the next step is to agree on the purpose of the large group meeting by asking, "if these outcomes are met, what will be different at the end of this meeting?" Bunker and Alban suggest that many large group meetings fail because the purpose "is unclear, too broad, or too narrowly focused" (1997, 218). Cady, Dannemiller, and Spalding, (unpublished 2003) advise that the purpose needs to be "broad enough to allow for flexibility and innovation while providing focus and direction for the identified objectives."

Developing a compelling purpose statement for a large group meeting can take a long time…and the struggle to agree on the purpose is vital to the success of the planning. Here are some tips for keeping the group moving towards the purpose statement:

- Let the design team brainstorm as a whole group any words or phrases or ideas that anyone thinks should belong in the purpose statement.
- Divide the team into subgroups and have each group draft a purpose statement. If there is not one draft that the whole team accepts as a first draft, find and circle words and phrases common to all drafts. Ask them to use those to create a common draft.
- Explain consensus and describe behavior that will help the group move to consensus—e.g., "Instead of saying what you don't like about the purpose draft, suggest what you want to add, change or delete and why."
- Be patient. People will drop out, come back in, get bored, get frustrated, etc. Stay positive and keeping encouraging.

- Be mindful to facilitate to consensus, not advocate for particular words or a purpose. The power of purpose comes from the planning team reaching consensus on the statement.

Principle #2: Think converge/diverge as a design framework towards consensus and action

A large group meeting involves a series of conversations that allow people to come together and move apart to create and sustain change. Managing the flow of these conversations is a critical element of design. A critical design component is having the participants sit in groups at round tables, usually eight people; each table group is a mix of diversity in the whole group, e.g., location, function, and length of service with the organization. The converge/diverge principle provides a model for planning a sequence of conversations that enables participants to: identify and express their individual thoughts to their table group (diverge); and share their group's collective thoughts with everyone in the room so everyone is aware of the diverse views in the room (converge). Table groups develop options for next steps (diverge); and make decisions for system wide action (converge). The goal of the "diverge" step is to get everyone's best thinking out on the table, generating as many ideas as possible. This usually creates a new reality for people as they begin to gain a broader perspective of issues facing the whole system or possibilities for ways to address issues. The goal of the "converge" step is to build a common whole system picture and then gain agreement on the best way to proceed to reach the desired outcomes.

Things to keep in mind when planning these divergent and convergent conversations in large groups:

- Make sure everyone knows the purpose of every conversation and activity; whether it is at the table or across the whole room (large group). Diverge in table groups to broaden understanding, brainstorm ideas and provide input.
- Converge in the whole room (large group) to build common understanding of the whole system view and make decisions on next steps.
- The most effective small group conversations to gain greater understanding of the issues facing the whole system take place within the table groups. By hearing the viewpoints of other participants, everyone builds a more complete picture of the current state of the whole and the potential for the future.

- The timing of conversations is critical for ensuring active participation throughout the meeting. The flow is usually from the individual to the tables to the whole room (large group). Prior to table work provide a brief period for self- reflection to ensure that the individual work receives attention.
- Find the balance between giving people enough information to get smart and having them exchange ideas about what they heard, know, think and believe. Follow presentations with small group discussion of what they heard. Ask for their reactions and the questions they need answered to deepen their understanding of the presenter's message.
- After people have stretched their thinking to the maximum in small group work, it is time to "get whole," that is, provide opportunities for everyone to gain a whole system perspective. One option includes a room-wide call-out where, on a rotating basis, a spokesperson from each table voices the group's agreed-on question or response to the topic being discussed. Another option is a "walk-about" activity where everyone walks around and reads the small group responses recorded on flip charts. A voting step (dots or checkmarks) may also be added to gain a collective sense of the most critical issues or next steps.

Principle #3: Evoke the right conversations in large groups to be sure all voices in the room are heard and considered….

Conversation is an avenue that leads to constructing a common picture of where we are. Reality often lies somewhere between the way you see something and the way I see the same thing. We often ask participants in a large group meetings to "listen to see the world through the eyes of the speaker". Our experience is that in listening this way we begin to see realities other than our own.

The art of evoking the right conversations in a large group meeting has several components – the conversation must:

- *Be purpose driven* – For every meeting we facilitate we have a purpose statement for the meeting – how will our world be different because we had this meeting? This purpose statement then drives every conversation during the meeting – we are constantly asking ourselves and our client “how will *this* conversation lead us to achieving our meeting purpose?”

- *Be theory based* – A key theoretical model that we use in designing conversation for large group meetings is DVF – **D**issatisfactions x **V**ision x **F**irst Steps > Resistance (Beckhard and Harris, 1987). As we design the meeting we ask ourselves how will this conversation help build a shared dissatisfaction, a shared vision of the future or the right first steps to lead us forward. We know that resistance is normal and we know that when a group has a shared picture of DVF they can overcome the normal resistance that comes with change.
- *Build toward a common database* – The more that meeting participants all know what everyone else knows the better the chance that the large group will be able to all move toward a collective vision of success. Each conversation needs to contribute to the large group’s shared understanding of the world they work in.
- *Build the team* – Whether we have participants seated in functional or cross-functional teams we always strive to build a better team. In designing conversations this means ensuring that the conversation encourages the inclusion of everyone’s voice. In the workings of the team this means rotating roles such as facilitator, recorder, reporter so that the team builds it capacity to run good meetings while sharing the load for keeping the conversation on track.
- *Be empowering* – When I feel smart about my contribution to a conversation I feel empowered. Following this thought we don’t ask participants to give input to a draft strategic plan without first having conversations to ensure that participants have a shared understanding of the environment in which they work, that is, giving them a first hand opportunity to hear from and then ask questions of customers, senior leaders, or other key stakeholders to see the world they see.
- *Allow for appropriate risk* – We all know the difference between a healthy stretch in exercising and a stretch that is too much too fast. It’s the same with conversations. In the beginning when we first meet someone, we are less willing to be open--we feel more vulnerable--than we are once we get to know them. At the beginning of a large group meeting the conversations should be less risky than they might be at the end of the meeting when we’re asking folks to commit to specific actions or new behaviors.

Principle #4: Plan for emergent design throughout the meeting to use information gathered as the meeting progresses. …

Even with a good agenda based on a planning team's purpose, outcomes and design recommendations, large group meeting facilitators need to be prepared to change the design throughout the meeting. We call this *emergent design*. Unlike small group meetings, in a large group meeting there is no luxury of having a whole-room conversation about "How is it going?" Instead we make sure we have a process for continually gathering data and for redesign of the agenda, as indicated by that data. This is a simple example of action research in motion.

Some of the ways we manage emergent design are:

- Never work alone. Large group meetings require two facilitators to manage the meeting in the moment while looking ahead at the design. Include the logistics coordinator in the redesign conversations.
- Stay flexible and attuned to what's happening in the moment. Continuously re-examine the upcoming agenda items for the meeting. Ask the planning team to huddle at the end of each day and at other times during the meeting to discuss:
    - "What's happening at your table? What are we seeing in the whole room? Are we where we would expect to be, given our meeting purpose and outcomes? Is the energy the right energy?
    - What are we learning from these observations?
    - Given that, and our meeting's purpose, do we need to change our agenda (meeting process, facilitation, energy…)?"
- Include leadership in this huddle! Leaders learn from the discussion in the planning team.
- Avoid getting hooked by the feedback of a single person (even if it's the leader). When approached by a meeting participant who sees something that's not working, we listen intently and recommend, "Let's pull together some of our planning team members (or talk to a few more folks) and get their impression."
- End each meeting day with a written evaluation from each participant. Ask a few simple questions that reflect where you expect participants to be at that point in the agenda. End with

"Advice for tomorrow." On the last day's evaluation, create questions that link back to the meeting purpose and solicit input on follow-up. Members of the planning team, as well as leaders/meeting sponsors responsible for the meetings outcomes, play an important role in reviewing participant feedback at the end of each day and help to formulate changes, if necessary, in the design for the following day.

- The next day, share what you and the planning team learned from the written evaluations and how the data has influenced the day's agenda. This sharing reinforces that the meeting results (and process) are everyone's responsibility.
- When we are redesigning, we remember Ron Lippitt's words: "Don't do anything for the individual that hurts the whole; and don't do anything for the whole that hurts the individual." We won't hold back the whole room so one or two tables can finish their work. Vice versa, we won't rush the rest of the room because one or two tables are finished.
- If we're behind the original designed schedule, we adjust the timing for upcoming activities and don't eliminate or shorten a break or lunch.
- We stay optimistic about what is happening. ("It ain't over 'til it's over"), and we simply won't let it fail.

Principle #5: Prepare the logistics to make the meeting details appear seamless to participants. ...: The Devil is in the Details

As the number of meeting participants increases, the logistical planning for the meeting becomes more critical to its success. We have found that having a detailed logistics plan and an organized, well-briefed logistics team to carry out the behind-the-scenes activities ensure a "seamless" meeting for the participants.

The work of the logistics team includes administrative planning prior to the meeting (such as making facility arrangements, specifying room setups, and assembling supplies and equipment) and getting everything set up and ready to go the day before the meeting. The role of the facilitators before the large group meeting is to oversee the preparation of the logistics plan and to make sure that everyone on the team has a good understanding of their role before and during the meeting. During the actual meeting the facilitators work through the logistics team leader to coordinate all communication, work, and assignments for the logisitics team and facility staff.

Some other logistical tips for managing large group meetings include:

- Make sure logistic team members understand that logistics work is often menial, but important, demanding, and fast-paced.
- Before the meeting begins, hold a "staging session" with the logistics team to ensure that all the logistics details are handled, in the actual meeting room if possible. The more complex the meeting, the longer the staging session needs to be.
- Make sure a logistics coordinator who is internal to the client organization receives enough help to prevent him from becoming overwhelmed.
- Keep the logistic team leader informed before and during the large group meeting about any changes in the design of the meeting or in logistics needs
- Provide "real time" feedback to the logistic team leader about the performance of the team.
- Make sure the logistics team is acknowledged for their contribution to a successful meeting!
- Schedule a "lessons learned" session with the logistics team after the large group meeting to learn what could have been done differently or better from their perspective.
- Remember that when it comes to logistics, *"the devil is in the details!"*

Principle #6: Develop a follow-up strategy to maintain momentum

After every meeting, action needs to occur to continue what was started in the meeting. For example, continuation after a strategic planning meeting may include the finalization of the plan or the beginning of execution of the plan. Continuation after a business meeting could involve action by those attending to build commitment throughout the organization to the decisions made at the session.

Large group meetings can take on a life of their own. The preparation, the unusual nature of bringing many people together, and the excitement of the meeting can all contribute to making the meeting an isolated happening. The collective sigh of relief after the meeting can contribute to a letdown; people go back to work with the intention of following up, but the crush of the everyday gets in the way. Intended actions get put off and the overall effectiveness of the meeting may slip away.

Here are some of the ways to help ensure that momentum continues after a large group meeting.

- Make certain that the purpose of the meeting describes a worthwhile difference that the meeting will make. A bland purpose or merely a set of activities in a meeting can result in no momentum to maintain.
- Start planning for continuation before the meeting begins, that is, in the planning process for the meeting itself. While you cannot always predict the specific outcomes of a meeting, you often know enough about what will happen in the meeting to anticipate needed follow-up activities. For example, planning team members might anticipate the need for communication of results or establishment of work groups to execute decisions made. This helps to anticipate the resources that may need to be committed as well as the structures that may need to be put into place to ensure follow-up. If nothing else, schedule a follow-up meeting with the planning team and/or leadership group the next, or within a few days after the large group meeting (schedule it well in advance).
- Create as much of the documentation of the meeting as possible during the meeting. The longer you wait, the colder the information generated, so accurate recording may be lost. Having the results and decisions before you leave a meeting is a powerful message to everyone that there is a sense of urgency to move forward.
- Be clear about actions and accountabilities before people leave the meeting. If people do not know their responsibilities, they will not act.
- Quickly communicate the results of the meeting, especially the decisions made to those affected by those decisions, to begin to enlist their commitment to the decisions and their execution.
- Find and achieve quick successes that result from the meeting actions. Give credit to those who made them happen and publicize the results to show that progress is being made.

Principle #7: Balance the multiple roles of facilitation to ensure that nothing falls through the cracks. …

Hold on to your hats! That's a huge job for facilitators of large group meetings since they wear many hats, often simultaneously. The key is in knowing which hats to wear and when to wear them. The seasoned facilitator has the ability to be in tune with the conscience of the group as it changes and to shift gears to achieve breakthrough. Kathie Dannemiller described this as taking in the DNA of a group and enabling what wants to happen next to actually happen. Facilitators must keep their antennae up and bring to bear everything they know about group dynamics, human interaction, and good design by watching the flow of the meeting as the design unfolds, taking the temperature/reading the energy of the group, and knowing when to intervene. Above all the facilitator is the guardian of the purpose statement; any on-the-spot changes to the design must be in service of achieving the stated purpose of the meeting. Through a combination of art and science, the skilled facilitator knows which roles need to come to the foreground at any given moment and can seamlessly integrate all roles to dance to the beat of the group.

The facilitator begins wearing multiple hats before the meeting begins and continues wearing some of the hats after the meeting is over. Below are the roles which the facilitator plays during the actual meeting. The challenge is simultaneously to be the time cop, shepherd, and Picasso of the large group meeting!

Coach

- It is important to coach leaders on the role they should play during the meeting, including hints for presentations they will make and their participation throughout the meeting.
- All speakers need coaching to understand the purpose of their presentations and how the information they are imparting fits into the overall design.

Coordinator

- The facilitation team must remain in synch at all times. One of the facilitators needs to ensure that the entire team is involved in decisions regarding changes to the design.

- The logistics team leader must be involved in any and all changes to the design, such as changes in timing, sequence of activities, and the addition of or deletion of activities. It is critical that the activities of the logistics team be performed with precision and in a seamless manner.

Designer

- The facilitators must anticipate changes that need to happen to the design before they need to happen. Decisions need to take into account the purpose statement and participant needs. Planning team members need to be included in decisions regarding major shifts in the design.

Facilitator

- The faciliators need to ensure that participants make smooth transitions from one activity to another. For example, because we cannot repeat instructions to a large group, clear framing for each activity is necessary to launch the participants to successful work.
- Facilitation of small groups may also be required in the planning and the actual meeting.

Principle #8: Manage the energy to maintain focus and forward movement throughout the meeting ...

We have all experienced enervating meetings that steal the energy of everyone present. When we leave those meetings, we are often tired and unmotivated to take further action. Sometimes we don't care about or can't even remember what happened. When large groups meet, the cumulative energy is significant and can pull a group in one of two directions; the potential for both energy loss and energy gain is great. Our goal when facilitating these meetings is to have participants leave with a great deal of individual and collective energy to move forward and continue the work started in the meeting. In order to accomplish this goal, we strive to ensure that the meeting design addresses both individual and group energy needs, enabling the necessary work to get done and the desired outcomes to be achieved.

Our experience tells us that the key ingredient for managing energy is active participation by all participants throughout the meeting. When participants have a chance to respond to what they hear in the moment and share their individual ideas with people who are really listening, they begin to own more of the system's issues and build greater commitment to action.

Below are some thoughts to keep in mind for managing energy in a large group meeting.

- Ensure that during most of the meeting, participants are working on activities or engaged in discussions versus listening to lectures and watching power point presentations. Having discussions and accomplishing meaningful tasks together in small groups creates energy.
- Alternate between passive listening (presentations that make people smart) and active participation (opportunities to build energy by "acting" on what people have heard).
- Limit individual presentations to 15 to 20 minutes and multiple sequential presentations to 30 minutes total.
- If possible, avoid slide presentations. Often slides are illegible and put the participants into a passive state that saps energy.
- Provide opportunities for physical movement throughout the meeting. When people get out of their chairs and move around, for example, to visit booths or participate in different small group meetings, they become more alert. (Activities requiring movement help overcome the lethargy that often follows a big lunch!)
- Insert short stand-up huddles to help get the blood flowing after a long stretch of listening to speakers or intense discussions at the table.
- Schedule frequent breaks to help people renew their energy and take care of physical and/or work issues that may distract them from full participation.
- Put energy in your voice and your body when giving assignments. Frame each activity so that participants understand that it is doable and is the right thing to be doing at that moment.

Principle #9: Practice the art of precise language to evoke energy and action. …

Often the way we see and explore a given issue is determined by the words we use to describe the issue. Words paint a picture for the listener based on how she or he perceives them. Practicing the "art" of language involves making conscious choices about the spoken and written words we use and the images and energy we want them to evoke. The language we use is critical in setting up each activity—what we refer to as "framing" the assignments. Besides giving directions, framing also includes creating the context and the energy for people to do the work that needs to be done. When we give instructions to a small group of 20, we can tell by facial expressions and actual questions whether participants understand what to do next. With a large group, however, it is much harder to recover if directions are not clear. Whether for 20, 200, or 2000 participants, the words we use, matter.

What's key for us as the facilitators of large groups in particular is the need to be authentic and aware of our choice of words; to know and understand our audience; and to understand the emotional tone of the group with whom we are working. If we are using language effectively, it serves many functions.

- *It is an invitation* – We always treat participants as adults that have choices, so our language is an invitation for them to participate – an invitation they can choose to accept or not.
- *It enables diverse perspectives* –Each individual has a unique view of the system, and his or her truth needs to be accepted rather than judged. Our goal is to allow each person's perspective to be heard, resulting in a rich and diverse common database.
- *It opens rather than closes possibilities* –The only way for organizations and communities to address the challenging issues they face today is to expand their thinking with new possibilities that come from all key stakeholders.
- *It empowers participants* –We often do an organization diagnosis in which we ask participants to share their experience and perceptions on a specific topic or process, such as communication. We intentionally choose language that trigger the appropriate ego-state. For example, we might ask, "What makes you glad, sad and mad about the communication that has taken place in the last year?" The choice of "glad, sad, mad" invites participants to step into their emotions about the topic; it gives voice to their emotions, and this creates an empowering experience.

- *It builds relationships* – One of the key advantages of a large group meeting is that it brings people from diverse parts of the system together to learn from each other. The language we use, spoken and written, sets the tone for building stronger relationships. For example, “Listen to see the world this person sees.”
- Our final word is, "make every word count!”

Principle #10: Facilitate from an egoless presence to keep the spotlight on the meeting, not the facilitator….

One of the things we always keep in mind when designing and facilitating meetings of all sizes is that each meeting must be about “them,” not “us.” In large group meetings in particular, it is essential to create processes that enable participants sitting at tables to engage in conversations with one another rather than direct their remarks to a facilitator leading room-wide conversations from the front of the room. This requires that the facilitator be in a healthy, adult state and willing to gain satisfaction from the work of the group rather than being a star.—often characterized by behaviors that exhibit respect, responsibility, and partnership. (See also Chapter X, *The Gift of Self: The Art of Transparent Facilitation.*)

As facilitators, examining our own value system and beliefs about people and ourselves is essential. First and foremost, we must be in touch with our personal purpose and individual control issues, ensuring that we always serve the client’s needs, not our own. We act out of our belief that the real wisdom in any organization is in the people, and we are driven to employ processes that uncover that wisdom. This belief is based on the characteristic of living systems to self organize. When each part of the system sees the system as a “commonly directed whole,” they find the answers and know what to do in order to meet their purpose. (Capra, 1996. See also Chapter X, Dynamic Facilitation: Design Principles from the New Science of Complexity.) To that end, we make a conscious effort to ensure that every interaction we have with the client system builds empowerment in its members. We seek to help connect the wisdom within the system rather than give the system our diagnosis and answers.

Standing in front of 100 or more people can give one a great sense of importance and power! However, the kind of facilitation we are talking about involves facilitators being "subtle enablers" in the room—that is, intentionally creating clear, brief framings for assignments that help meeting participants engage with one other and then stepping out of the way. When our joy and affirmation comes from helping people achieve their desired results, then we hope to hear participants say as they walk out the door, "That was exactly the meeting we needed to have right now. We need to do this more often." instead of, "You are a very good facilitator to handle a crowd like this!"

Below are some additional considerations to keep in mind in developing an egoless presence.

- Never work alone. Ask and trust a partner to hold up a mirror for you regarding your facilitation.
- Be curious. When you listen to clients, listen to see the world they see. If you are arguing with clients or complaining to others about them, it might be a clue that you believe you have the answer. In order to be of service to our clients, we need to love and respect them, especially when we don't agree with them.
- Create self-sufficiency. Build participants' competencies throughout the meeting including listening, speaking, recording, and facilitating.
- Consult with your planning team when things aren't going as expected.
- Base meeting evaluations on whether desired outcomes were achieved rather than how well participants liked the meeting or the facilitator.
- Admit when you are wrong, and learn from your mistakes.

SUMMARY

Facilitating a meeting that gets results every time can become more predictable (and energizing for everyone!) when you truly believe that the wisdom is in the people and that when connected around the right purpose and activities, they will find the answers.

As you integrate these principles into your own knowledge, experience and style, stay alert to the fact that each client is unique and adjust each engagement to meet that client's specific requirements. Listen to the advice of the planning team members. Together with the meeting sponsor and planning team, agree that the meeting design has:

1. a clear purpose,

2. a shared set of the right information that makes the system "whole" and wise so participants make and execute informed decisions, and

3. structured processes to support the conversations and activities that must take place in order to accomplish the desired meeting outcomes.

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