



Facilitating Difficult Situations

What Can You Expect as the Facilitator?

While most participants will quickly jump in and provide feedback, you can expect that there may be some participants that disrupt the process. The most common kinds of disrupters are people who try to dominate, keep going off the agenda, have side conversations with the person sitting next to them, or participants who think they are right and ridicule or minimize other's comments.

What Can You Do to Prevent and Manage Disruptive Behavior?

As the facilitator, it is important to convey confidence in the assessment process. It's also important to minimize any potential behavior that could stifle the process, deter the group's efforts, alienate participants or cause frustration. Below, several tips for dealing with disruptive behavior are provided.

- **Create a sense of shared accountability and group investment in completing the assigned assessment questions.** This can be done by getting buy-in and agreement on the process, ground rules, expectations and anticipated outcomes.
- **Don't be defensive.** If you are criticized, pause before responding calmly. Once you become defensive, you risk losing the group's respect and trust, and might cause participants to feel they can't be honest with you.
- **Acknowledge the power players.** These participants can impact the success of your process if they don't feel that their influence and role are acknowledged and respected. If possible, give them acknowledgment prior to the start of your session. Additionally, consider checking in with them during breaks to see how they think the meeting is going.
- **Address the point.** If there is someone who keeps expressing doubts about the assessment process, puts down others' suggestions, keeps bringing up the same point over and over, or seems to want to derail the process try one or more of these approaches:
 - 1) Show that you understand their issue by making it clear that you hear how important it is to them. Legitimize the issue by saying, "It's a very important point and one I'm sure we all feel is critical."
 - 2) Make a bargain to deal with their issue for a short period of time ("O.K., let's deal with your issue for 5 minutes and then we ought to move on.")
 - 3) If that doesn't work, agree to defer the issue to the end of the meeting, or set up a committee to explore it further.
- **Use body language.** Move closer to conversers, or to the quiet ones. Make eye contact with them to get their attention and convey your intent.