Dynamic Facilitation

Dynamic Facilitation is a facilitation method designed for complex, emotional, or deadlocked issues. Unlike traditional workshops, it does not aim to structure discussions, evaluate ideas, or reach decisions as quickly as possible. Instead, it creates space for different perspectives, emotions, ideas, and concerns.
The goal is to enable a shared creative breakthrough, allowing the group to develop new solutions that are supported by everyone involved.

Participation Depth	Inform, Participate
Project Phase	Onboarding
Goals	Understanding & Gathering Perspectives
Format	Analogue
Duration	1 - 3 Hours, 1 Day
Target Group	Directly Affected, Interested Public, Hard-to-Reach Groups
Group Size	Small Group up to 15, Medium Group up to 30
Characteristics	Creative, Structured

GOAL OF THE METHOD

The goal of Dynamic Facilitation is to help people discover new solutions together. Rather than mediating between existing positions, the method creates the conditions for a creative breakthrough in which entirely new ideas emerge that were previously not visible.

PROCEDURE

Preparation

1. Choose the right guiding question
Dynamic Facilitation works best when:

- different interests are involved
- strong emotions exist
- previous attempts have failed to resolve the issue
- participants hold entrenched positions

Suitable questions include:

- *"How can we use public space more fairly?"*
- *"How can we create affordable housing while preserving green spaces?"*
- *"How can our city centre become more attractive?"*

Less suitable questions include:

- *"What colour should the bench be?"*
- *"Which meeting date works best?"*

2. Prepare the room
Prepare:

- four large flipcharts or pinboards
- plenty of paper
- thick markers that are easy to read
- chairs arranged in a circle without tables

Label the four boards:

- Challenges & Questions – problems and key questions
- Solutions & Ideas – all proposed ideas
- Concerns & Objections – worries, risks, and criticism
- Information & Perspectives – facts, observations, and viewpoints

All four boards should remain visible throughout the session.

3. Clarify the facilitator's role
The facilitator has a distinct role.

They:

- do not evaluate contributions
- do not prioritise ideas
- do not participate in the discussion
- do not steer the group toward particular outcomes

Instead, they listen carefully and record each contribution on the appropriate board.

Execution

1. Open the problem space

Invite participants to describe:

- what concerns them
- what is not working
- which questions remain unanswered

Helpful prompts include:

- *"What is the real challenge?"*
- *"What makes this issue difficult?"*
- *"What concerns you most?"*

Whenever possible, the facilitator reformulates statements as open questions.

Instead of: *"There is not enough public space for people to stay."*

write: *"How can we improve the quality of public spaces?"*

This shifts attention toward possible solutions.

2. Allow ideas to emerge
As ideas arise, record every suggestion on the **Solutions & Ideas** board.

Important:

- every idea is documented
- ideas are not evaluated
- feasibility is not discussed at this stage

Helpful questions include:

- *"What possibilities do you see?"*
- *"Which idea would you like to explore?"*
- *"What might work?"*

3. Make concerns visible

Whenever criticism or concerns are expressed, place them on the **Concerns & Objections** board rather than attaching them to the ideas.

Idea: *"Let's build a new meeting place in the park."*

Concern: *"Who will maintain it?". "Could it increase noise?"*

This allows ideas to remain visible while ensuring concerns are taken seriously.

Separating ideas from concerns is one of the defining characteristics of Dynamic Facilitation.

4. Collect information and perspectives
Many contributions are neither problems nor solutions.

Examples include:

- *"A neighbouring town has already implemented a similar project."*
- *"Young people expressed different views in the survey."*

These belong on the **Information & Perspectives** board.

Important:

The facilitator does not judge whether statements are correct. The objective is simply to make perspectives visible.

5. Allow silence
After the initial discussion, most familiar arguments have usually been expressed.

A period may follow in which:

- nobody speaks
- the discussion seems to stall
- previous points are repeated

This stage is intentional.

Many facilitators make the mistake of trying to speed up the discussion.

Instead:

- allow silence

- avoid intervening
- continue listening

New insights often emerge during this quiet phase.

6. Enable a creative breakthrough
Ideally, the group begins developing entirely new ideas that were previously invisible.

The aim is not to choose between Solution A and Solution B through majority voting.

Instead, the goal is to discover a new solution that resolves existing tensions and gains broad support across the group.

Evaluation

1. Document the results
Photograph all four boards.

Document:

- challenges
- ideas
- concerns
- information and perspectives

Important:

The relationships between the four categories should remain visible.

2. Reflect on shared learning
Invite participants to reflect:

- What has changed?
- Which new perspectives emerged?
- Which ideas should be explored further?
- Which questions remain open?

3. Agree on next steps

Dynamic Facilitation often leads to:

- working groups
- workshops
- citizens' forums
- further participation processes

The method itself usually does not replace later decision-making.

Make the results accessible to everyone involved and explain how participants' contributions will influence the next stages of the process. This demonstrates that their ideas and engagement are valued.

Source: https://partizipation.at/partizipation-anwenden/methoden/

WHEN USEFUL?

- discussions have reached an impasse
- dealing with emotional or conflict-laden topics
- different perspectives strongly diverge
- conventional discussions are no longer productive
- addressing complex issues without obvious solutions
- creative approaches are needed
- fostering understanding between opposing viewpoints

WHEN NOT USEFUL?

- making straightforward factual decisions
- only collecting information
- conducting traditional brainstorming sessions
- rapid decisions are required

TIPS

- Trust the process.
- Do not try to speed up discussions.

- Record contributions as closely as possible to participants' own words.
- Keep ideas and concerns clearly separated.
- Allow contradictions to remain.
- Avoid evaluating contributions.
- Allow sufficient time.
- Create an atmosphere of trust and openness.

NOT SUITABLE FOR

- situations requiring quick decisions
- questions with obvious or straightforward solutions
- groups that are not open to new perspectives
- processes focused solely on collecting facts
- topics without emotional or societal relevance

View online: https://methoden.urbankit.de/en/methods/dynamic-facilitation