REAL-TIME EVALUATION TOOLS FOR MEETINGS & WORKSHOPS

/ Taking the pulse of a meeting /

WHAT ARE REAL-TIME EVALUATION TOOLS, AND WHY SHOULD I USE THEM?

Real-time meeting evaluation tools are quick and easy ways to evaluate the effectiveness of a major meeting, event or workshop **while it is happening**, and thereby enable altering the course of the meeting, if necessary in order to meet participant needs and/or fulfil meeting objectives.

By evaluating an on-going meeting for participant learning, level of engagement, general impressions and group dynamics, a facilitator can make real-time course corrections in order to improve meeting outcomes. Real-time evaluation techniques also give time for participants to reflect on their learning, thereby encouraging improved retention and application of meeting content. Major meetings and workshops can be costly, both in time and money; real-time meeting evaluation tools are a way to obtain the best possible results for the investment.

While there are many tried and tested meeting evaluation techniques, these are usually applied at the end of a meeting in order to elicit feedback from participants and help plan for the next meeting. Real-time tools are a great complement to the traditional workshop evaluation process.

Real-time meeting evaluation tools can be used singly or in combination. Each tool has its own requirements. **The following seven tools are described in detail below.**

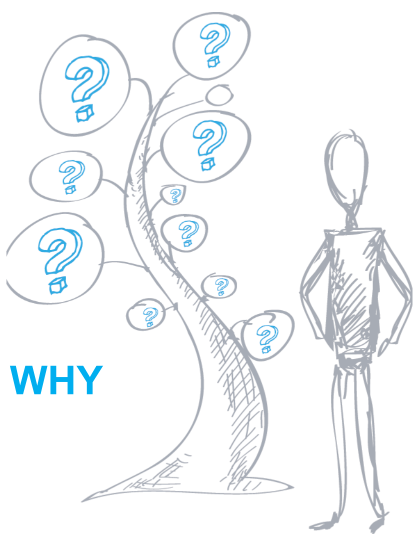
A. Mood Meter
B. Flash
C. Human Scale
D. Feedback Board
E. Eyes and Ears
F. Reflective Feedback
G. Final Evaluation using flipcharts

A. Mood Meter

The Mood Meter is a flipchart table used in multi-day workshops to gauge the general mood of participants each day.

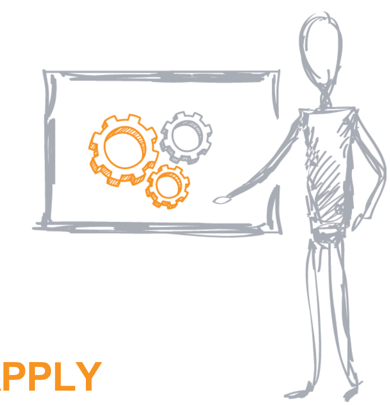
REQUIREMENTS:

- *10 - 30 participants*
- *Flipchart*
- *Pin board*
- *3 cards (circular, diameter 4 - 6 inches)*
- *Dot stickers: 1 per day for each event participant, e.g. a 3 day event with 20 participants = 60 stickers minimum*
- *5 - 10 minutes per iteration*



WHEN AND WHY TO USE

The Mood Meter is a tool for displaying, at a glance, the reactions of meeting or workshop participants. Normally used at the end of each day, the Mood Meter is a visible record that participants can use to quickly share how they feel without using words. Data from the Mood Meter can be analyzed during a plenary session mid-way through a workshop – especially if it suggests that things are not going as well as they should be – or at the end, for reflection, appropriate response by event organizers and future planning.



HOW TO APPLY

1. **Draw a table on a flipchart sheet with the days of the workshop (or specific events in the workshop) as columns,** e.g., Monday, Tuesday, etc. Add three rows to the table and stick the circular cards on each row. Draw a face on each of the circular cards: a happy face, an indifferent/straight face and an unhappy/frustrated face, in descending order. These cards represent the moods of the participants in relation to how the workshop is going.

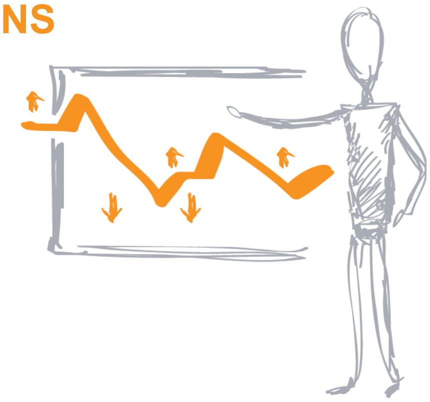
2. **Pin the flipchart table on a pin board,** and place it in a common location that is discreet, preferably near the exit. Leave it there for the duration of the workshop. This will give participants a moment for reflection before they leave the workshop for the day.

3. **At the end of every day, ask participants to pass by the flipchart board as they leave and place a dot sticker to indicate their mood (happy, indifferent or unhappy) for the day.**

4. **Keep track of the results.** For the facilitator, the Mood Meter is a useful way to read a group's energy. The dots placed on the meter will show clearly whether or not participants are happy with how the workshop is going. If the Mood Meter shows that a significant number of participants are unhappy, you can enquire further by asking participants in plenary for clarification, and you can use their feedback to improve the remaining sessions in the workshop.

5. Optional: The Mood Meter can also be used as a debrief tool at the end of a workshop to enable participants to discuss the workshop highs and lows; this provides an opportunity for reflection on workshop content, and can help to improve future workshops.

VARIATIONS



- The Mood Meter can be applied at half-day intervals, in short workshops of no more than 2-3 days duration. Participants put their stickers on the table before lunch and just before they leave for the day.

B. Flash

Flash is a speedy method to gather participant feedback, thoughts or impressions at any time during a plenary meeting. The facilitator asks a direct question, and participants respond quickly with short answers, i.e., in a 'flash'. This is an easy way for facilitators to gauge participants' reactions during or after a plenary activity.

REQUIREMENTS:

- *Facilitator*
- *10 - 20 participants (suggested maximum, in order to keep the Flash quick)*
- *Pin board (optional)*
- *Cards and marker pens (optional)*
- *5 - 10 minutes (depending on number of participants)4 flipchart sheets*

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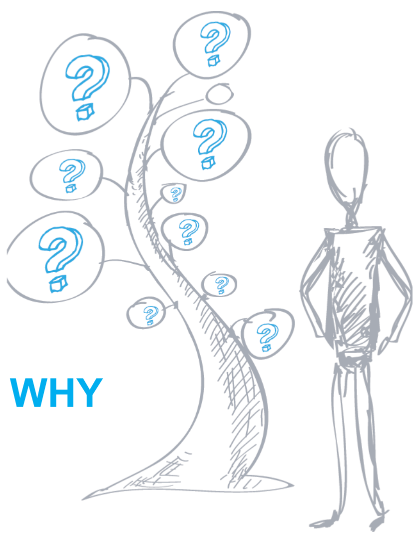


WHEN AND WHY TO USE

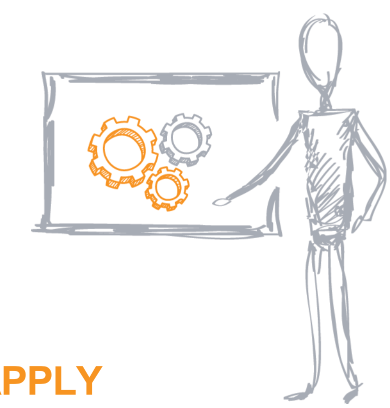
Best used sparingly, the Flash method can provide quick, and sometimes deep, insights into how all participants feel about an activity just concluded or an issue being discussed.

◢ Use Flash to get participants to reflect on a meeting or workshop session that has had a strong impact on them.

◢ Use Flash surface people's thoughts on important or sensitive issues when there are dominant voices in the group who may tend to shut out others.

◢ Get direct feedback from each meeting participant in a short time.

◢ Close a meeting or workshop in an effective, impactful way. The Flash method encourages participants to reflect on how the sessions have affected them and articulate their learning, without taking a lot of time.



HOW TO APPLY

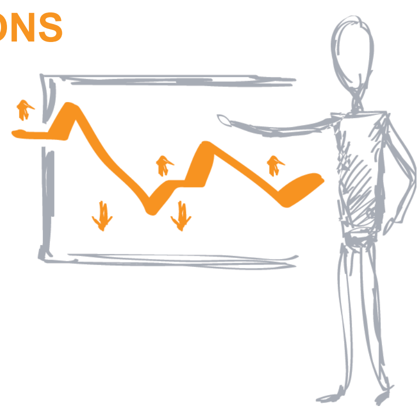
1. Sit with all participants in a close circle.

2. **Ask a straightforward question**, e.g., “How do you feel about the activity you just experienced?” “What is the one thing you will take away from this workshop?” “What do you expect to learn?” If using Flash to close a meeting, give participants a minute or two to reflect.

3. **Request each participant to answer in no more than 5 seconds**. **Beginning at any point in the circle, have participants give their answers in rapid succession (in a ‘flash’) from one to the next, going around the circle.**

4. Optional: You or a rapporteur may write down keywords from the responses on cards, pin them to a board, and cluster the cards to show the similarities or diversity in thinking among participants.

VARIATIONS



- **Flash one-word**: Each participant is only allowed a one-word response. The question must be appropriate, e.g., “Share with us in one word, what you think of the activity you just experienced.” “In one word, tell us how you are feeling right now.”

- **Anonymous non-verbal Flash**: This is good for getting responses to sensitive questions such as “Was this session worth your time?” Ask participants to write their responses – either one word or a short statement – on cards before handing them to you face-down. Shuffle the cards and post them on a pin board, clustering cards with similar responses together. The non-verbal Flash is conducted anonymously, so use identical cards and ensure all participants have pens of the same colour.

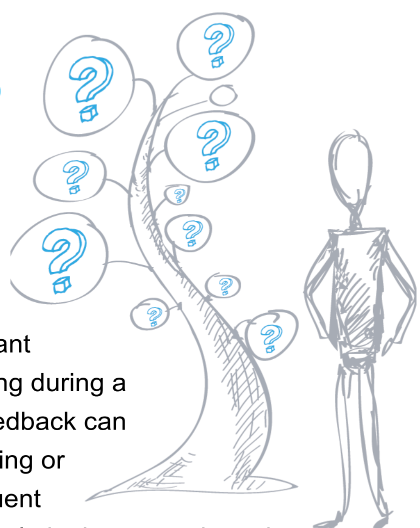
C. Human Scale

Human Scale is a simple method for evaluating participant learning in a non-written way, while opening the door for dialogue concerning the item or topic being evaluated. Participants respond to questions from the facilitator by taking positions along a large measurement scale marked on the floor with tape. This exercise can lead to interesting discussions on why participants have chosen to stand in a particular spot on the scale, and what could be done differently.

REQUIREMENTS:

- *Facilitator*
- *15 - 30 participants*
- *Large room*
- *Masking tape (or other tape that will not leave a residue)*
- *Cards and marker pens*
- *10 minutes (less formal) or 20 - 30 minutes (more formal; see below)*

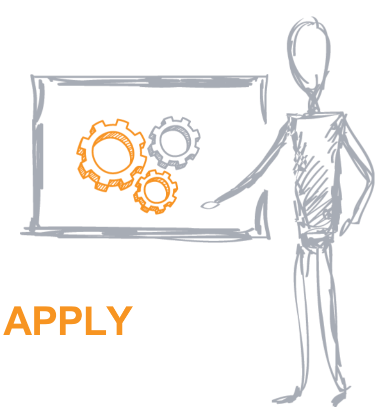
WHEN AND WHY TO USE



Human Scale allows a facilitator to monitor participant interest and learning during a workshop. This feedback can be helpful in planning or modifying subsequent sessions, for example by incorporating other learning methods or introducing interactive sessions in order to sustain interest levels. It can also be useful to re-energise a workshop as participants are forced to stand up and move about the room.

Human Scale can also be used at the end of a workshop as an interactive evaluation tool. It offers a relaxed and informal way to get feedback, and can increase the quantity and quality of feedback received – compared to the use of paper or online feedback forms – because participants are often more willing to share feedback pro-actively in plenary, and because you can ask them questions to clarify their choices or ratings.

Note that Human Scale is not an anonymous method. Therefore take care to ask questions that are not too sensitive. Similarly, don't ask questions that are liable to false positives, e.g. if the senior person who sponsored the session is in the room while the session is being evaluated, it may be OK to ask what parts of the session worked well, but it is probably not a good idea to ask whether it was a useful session overall.



HOW TO APPLY

1. Create a straight line on the floor using masking tape. Ensure the line is long enough for participants to cluster around comfortably, i.e., 10 -15 feet long. Using cards, label one end of the

line as 0% and the other as 100%. Label at regular intervals within the line, e.g. 25%, 50% and 75%.
(If using Human scale to evaluate a single session, proceed to 2A. If using it for final evaluation at the end of a workshop, proceed to 2B).

2A. *(Evaluating a single session – less formal approach).* **Ask 2 - 3 questions that help participants reflect on the activity/ session they have just experienced.** Each question should start with "How well do you know/ think/ feel…", and focus on only one point. Give participants time (perhaps 1 minute) to decide where on the scale they would like to stand in response to the question.

Once all participants have taken position on the scale, look for patterns and clusters. Choose a few participants and ask them why they chose to stand at a particular spot on the scale; this will help them and others to clarify their own understanding, as well as providing a potential basis for adjustments in subsequent sessions. Repeat the process for all of your questions. Record responses on a flipchart, if desired.

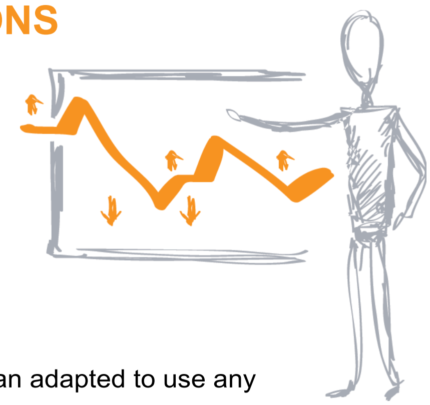
2B. *(Evaluating an entire workshop – more formal approach.)* **Write 4-5 evaluation questions on a flipchart sheet (or have them pre-written).** Questions should address the major aspects of the workshop. For example:

- To what extent did the content match your needs?
- How much did the facilitation process help you with your learning?
- How far were your objectives met?
- Etc.

Pose the questions one by one, asking participants to take an appropriate place along the scale according to their own assessment. Make sure to obtain meaningful explanations as to why people have positioned themselves at various points on the line, especially if there are clumps or outliers. This gives the Human Scale its value.

Work out a quick average based on where the participants stand and record this on the flipchart next to the corresponding question. Spend about 20 - 30 minutes in total. **Once all questions have been answered, discuss and analyze the results in plenary,** and use them as appropriate for reporting and planning future events.

VARIATIONS



Human Scale can adapted to use any kind of scale:

- Scale of 0 to 1, i.e., 0, ¼, ½, ¾, 1
- Battery points: Positive and Negative, with gradations in between
- North and South Pole
- Or define your own range.

Adapt your questions as well, so that participants can organize themselves against the scale used.

D. Feedback Board

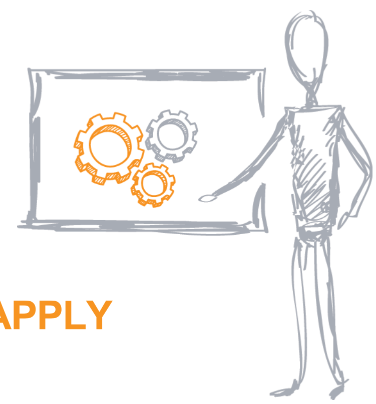
A Feedback Board provides a simple way to collect anonymous feedback from participants, especially during long workshops.

REQUIREMENTS:

- *Facilitator*
- *15 - 40 participants*
- *Pin board*
- *Cards and marker pens*
- *No specific time requirement: Participants are free to share their feedback on the board at any time, either during breaks or when they come in or leave for the day*

WHEN AND WHY TO USE

A Feedback Board is useful for gathering ideas and suggestions anonymously about any aspect of an event (content, process, etc.). It offers a low-pressure means of getting inputs and is great for multi-day workshops.



HOW TO APPLY

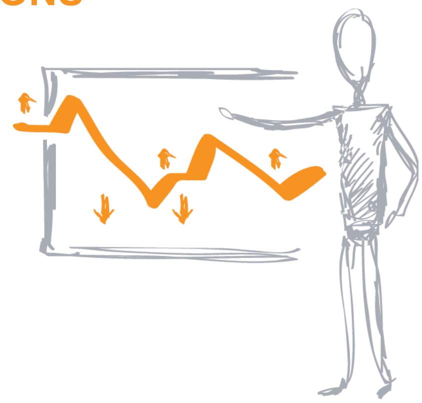
1. Set up an empty pin board with cards and marker pens in a location allowing participants to provide feedback discreetly, for example behind the work room or near where people take their coffee breaks.

2. Let participants know that the Feedback Board is available for anonymous comments and suggestions at any time during the workshop, and that you will be looking at the feedback with a view to applying it where possible. Inform them that the feedback can be on any topic related to the workshop, i.e. facilitation process, content, topics discussed, pointers for improvement, etc. If desired, you can put cards with these and other topics on the feedback board as a guide to participants on all the areas they can consider when providing feedback. Leave it up to the participants as to when, and how often, to leave feedback.

3. Check the board at intervals. Discuss any interesting/ useful comments in plenary. If appropriate, you can incorporate suggestions into the workshop.

Note: The Feedback Board is an anonymous process, hence there should not be any pressure or effort to identify the authors of any of the cards (they may voluntarily step forward if they so choose).

VARIATIONS



The Feedback board can be adapted for other purposes beyond evaluation. These could include.

- Gathering ideas on an issue
- Creating a wish list
- As a parking space for issues or topics that do not fit in with the objectives of the event but could be incorporated in a future one.

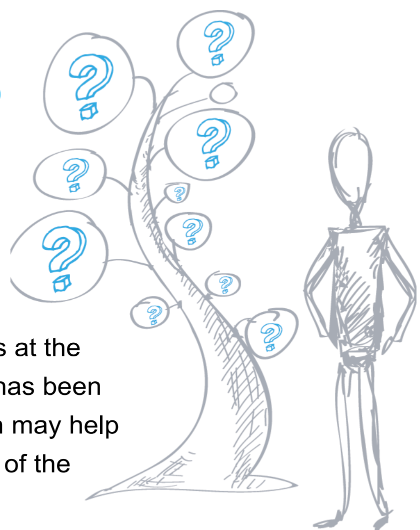
E. Eyes and Ears

The simple method is a way for participants to get impressions from their peers on the content and impact of a multi-day event/workshop.

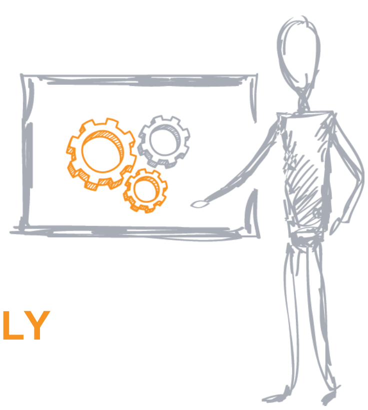
REQUIREMENTS:

- *10 - 60 participants*
- *2 volunteers per day of a multi-day event*
- *5 - 10 minutes in plenary, at the start of the 2nd and subsequent days*
- *Optional: Projector to share smartphone pictures of the event*

WHEN AND WHY TO USE



Eyes and Ears allows participants to hear from others at the event about what has been happening – which may help to clarify the value of the event, give a new perspective, crystallize certain questions or issues, and provide a useful supplementary means of assessment for the facilitators.



HOW TO APPLY

1. Each morning before the workshop begins, ask for two volunteers to be the 'Eyes' and 'Ears' for the day. The 'Eyes' will observe the goings-on at the workshop – what is seen, e.g., participants' mood, level of engagement, energy levels, attendance, distribution in sub-groups, etc. Optionally, the 'Eyes' can supplement their work by taking smartphone pictures. Meanwhile the 'Ears' will listen to what participants say, e.g., type of questions asked, comments during the breaks on the quality and utility of the workshop, etc., and can ask them questions for clarification if needed.

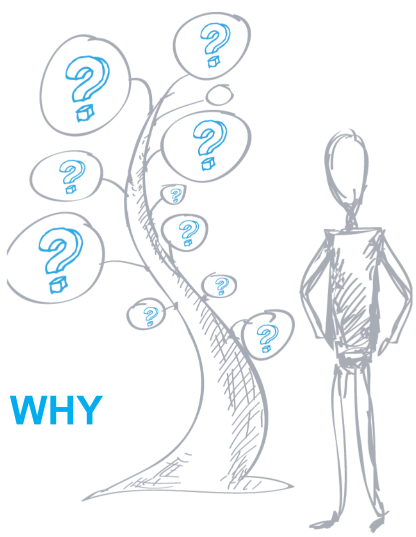
2. The next morning, ask the 'Eyes' and 'Ears' to share what they saw/heard in plenary. Their report may include participant behaviours and reactions to the content and process; how the facilitator/s fared, in their opinion; or other relevant impressions, including those they may have gleaned from other participants. If the 'Eyes' took photos, they can be shown with a projector.

F. Reflective Feedback

Reflective Feedback leverages participant-created multimedia to inspire reflection and brief reviews of happenings during a multi-day event.

REQUIREMENTS:

- *10 - 30 participants (can be adapted for more participants as this is a static tool, requiring minimal involvement from the facilitator)*
- *2 volunteers per day of a multi-day event, with basic photography and PowerPoint skills*
- *Digital camera*
- *Computer laptop*
- *Digital projector*
- *Flipchart*
- *5 - 10 minutes in plenary, at the start of the 2nd and subsequent days*

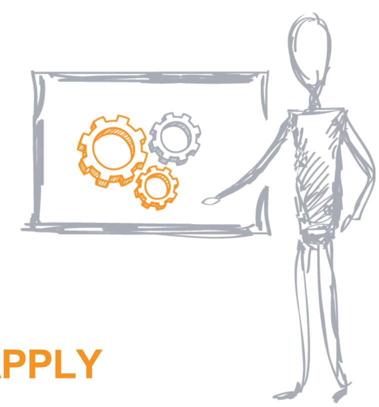


WHEN AND WHY TO USE

Reflective Feedback allows participants to lead a reflection/ review process on each day of a workshop. People tend to trust their peers; a peer-led review process can help obtain useful feedback that a standard facilitator-led process might not elicit.

The photos and music incorporated into the multimedia slide show help to stimulate participants' memory of the previous day, and also encourage them to be forthcoming with their feedback.

Best used in multi-day workshops, Reflective Feedback is conducted every day successively, with the last iteration taking place on the morning of the final day.



HOW TO APPLY

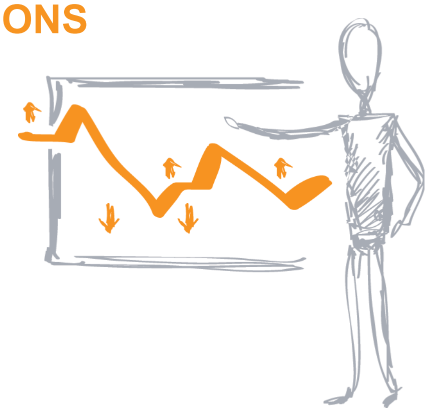
1. **On the morning of the first day, ask for volunteers to conduct the Reflective Feedback process** – one pair of volunteers to work together for each day of the workshop. Once you have enough volunteers, brief them on their tasks according to the steps below. If your event is small (10 - 15 participants) you could

have only one (appropriately energetic) person to do each day's review.

2. Ask the volunteers to take photos during the day, preferably photos of participants in action or interesting moments, and incorporate a selection of these into a 1 - 2 min PowerPoint slideshow, set to music. It does not have to be professional, but it should be lively and enjoyable. The volunteers would work on this in the evening after the workshop day ends and should take no more than 30 minutes to prepare a two-minute presentation.

3. In the morning of the next day, give the volunteers a total of up to 10 minutes to show their Reflective Feedback presentation, and to follow up with questions to other participants, in order to get them talking about the previous day's events. Best are simple questions like "What did you learn?", "What did you enjoy?", "Was there anything you did not enjoy?", etc. Capture the highlights on a flipchart.

VARIATIONS



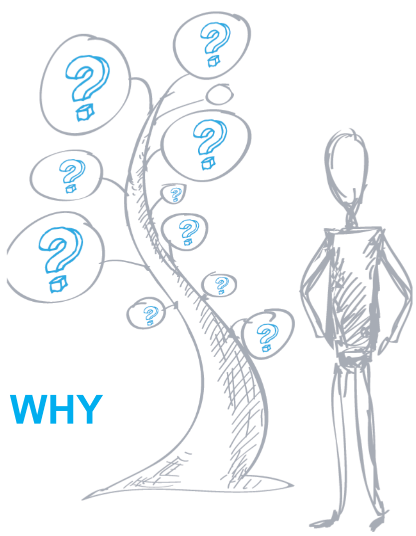
After presenting their slideshow, instead of asking plenary questions the volunteers may use the Flash technique, by asking participants to share their one major learning/ highlight from the previous day, in just a few seconds each. The highlights/keywords can be captured on flipchart.

G. Final Evaluation using flipcharts

This method is not as much ‘on the go’ as are the others in this collection, since it is conducted at the end of a workshop. It replaces the traditional use of individual feedback forms with a visual and interactive feedback process using flipcharts.

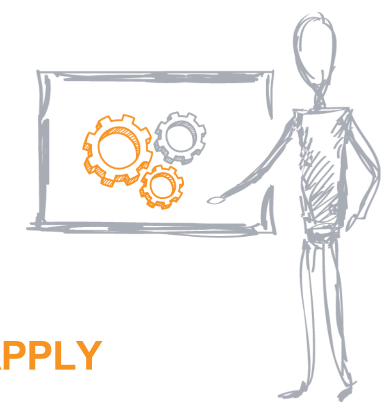
REQUIREMENTS:

- *Facilitator*
- *10 - 30 participants*
- *Pin board*
- *Flipchart sheets*
- *Marker pens*
- *Dot stickers (one colour, enough for all participants for 5 - 6 questions each)*
- *30 - 45 minutes*
- *20- 30 participants*



WHEN AND WHY TO USE

Use this method at the end of a meeting or workshop event. It is particularly valuable for evaluating novel workshop activities or innovative approaches that you may have used. It provides a transparent, visual record of an event’s strengths and weaknesses, encouraging open exchange and meaningful contributions from participants. The concluding discussion will help in applying the findings of the evaluation for planning future meetings and workshops.



HOW TO APPLY

1. **Compile a set of 5 - 6 relevant evaluation questions.** For example.

   - “To what extent did we achieve the objectives?” Then list each objective of the event.
   - “To what extent were your expectations for this event met?”
   - “How effective was the facilitation?”
   - “How would you rate the logistics of the event?”
   - And other relevant questions, depending on your event.

2. Write all of your evaluation questions on flipchart sheets, in advance. Below each question, add five rows labelled with an evaluation scale, such as:

- Excellent; Good; Average; Fair; Poor
- 5 (best) to 1 (worst)

Example:

Questions	Poor	Fair	Average	Good	Excellent
To what degree did we achieve the goals? • Goal 1 • Goal 2					
To what extent were your expectations for this event met?					
How effective was the facilitation?					
How would you rate the logistics of the event?”					

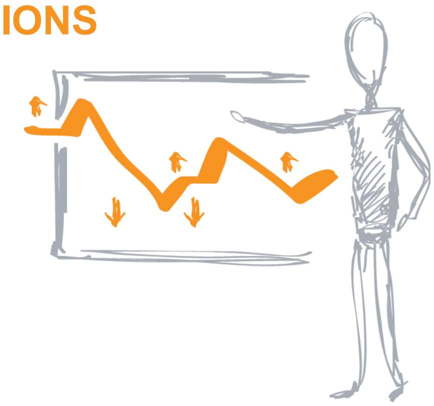
3. Pin the flipchart sheets to a pin board. Place the pin board in a discreet location away from the organizers and facilitators view.

4. When it is time for the evaluation exercise, ask participants to individually rate the questions by placing dot stickers in the appropriate column for each question. Give them enough time to do so; don’t observe them, rather remain apart or even leave the room for a time.

5. After everyone has completed their evaluation, place the pin board in full view of all, and do an analysis in plenary. Take note of the majority ratings and any clusters, and ask questions for clarification. In situations where a question is rated poorly, be objective, ask for feedback and gather suggestions for improvements. Even if a question is rated well, ask if anything could have been improved. As long as the process is fair and does not pinpoint or assign blame, participants will share honest feedback.

Note: It is important for the facilitator to remain objective despite any negative feedback. A good way to do so might be to look first at the positives and celebrate the successes. Then tackle carefully any ratings that are poor, so that people feel comfortable sharing the reasons for a low rating. You are trying to obtain meaningful feedback, and this will require some sensitivity.

VARIATIONS



- **Have participants determine the criteria for evaluating the event**: Give each participant a card to pick one criterion. Collect the cards and pin them to the board, then cluster the similar ones and derive a question from each. Thereafter the evaluation scale and rating process can be applied as described above.

For more than 15 participants, it may be possible to group them into pairs or threes and ask them to come up with one or two criteria of their choice. This may take up to 10 minutes for group work though

Match-stick feedback method: Write 5-6 relevant questions on cards (such as VIPP cards). Instead of dots on a flipchart, participants use matches placed into paper plates to choose their responses. At the end of the session/day, place the questions on a table, lined up side by side along the top edge. Below each question, place a row of three saucers or paper plates. You will end up with a row of cards with questions, and three rows of saucers/plates. The rows of plates correspond to 'high', 'medium' and 'low' options. Give participants each a handful of matches (or paper clips, or other small identical objects). Ask them to choose the high, medium or low option for each question, by passing by the table and placing their matchsticks in the corresponding plate. Once voting is complete, ask a few volunteers to give comments. Record the results for future reference

More, less or the same: a flip chart into three columns, labelled 'More', 'Less' and 'Same'. At the end of the session/day, place the flipchart near the exit (or even out in the hall), hand out marker pens and ask participants to briefly write down things that worked well for them in the Same column; things they wanted to see less of, e.g. 'use of jargon', in the Less column; and things they wanted more of, e.g. 'chances to practice new skills', in the More column. Encourage them to include reasons for their choices. Don't linger near the flipchart; participants should feel that they are free to write what they want, in order to encourage honest feedback.

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Seeds For Change Network. "Tools for evaluating meetings and workshops", Seeds for Change, http://seedsforchange.org.uk/tools#evaluating , accessed 28 January 2015.

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