

Problem	Typical mistake	Effective response
Domination by a highly vocal member of the group	Inexperienced facilitators often try to control this person. "Excuse me X, do you mind if I let someone else take a turn?" Or, even worse, "Excuse me X, you are taking up a lot of the group's time."	When one person is over-contributing, everyone else is under-participating. To resolve this, focus your efforts on the passive majority - encouraging them to participate more. Trying to change the dominant person merely gives that person all the more attention.
Messing about in the middle of a discussion	It's tempting to try to 'organise' people by getting into a power struggle with them. "OK everyone, let's get refocused." This only works when the problem isn't very serious.	Aim for a break as soon as possible. People are likely to have become undisciplined because they are overloaded or worn out. After a breather, they will be able to focus much better.
Low participation by the entire group	Low participation can create the impression that a lot of work is getting done in a hurry. This leads to one of the worst errors a facilitator can make – that is, assuming that silence means consent and doing nothing to encourage greater participation.	Switch from large-group open discussion to a different format that lowers anxiety levels. If feeling safe and secure is a major concern, small group activities are very important. Ideas-listing can also work very well when participation is low.

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Two people locking horns	A lot of time can be wasted trying to resolve a conflict between two people who have no intention of reaching agreement. People often use each other as sparring partners in order to clarify their own ideas.	Reach out to other people in the group by asking, "Who else has an opinion on this issue?" or "Let's step back for a minute and see if there are other issues that need to be discussed." Remember not to focus your attention on the dominant minority but spend your energies encouraging the passive majority.
One or two silent members in a group of otherwise active participants	Asking "X, you haven't said much today, is there anything you'd like to add?" may work when a shy member of the group has non-verbally indicated a desire to speak. However, all too often the quiet person feels put on the spot and withdraws even further.	You could say, "I'd like to get opinions from those who haven't talked for a while." Breaking into small groups works even better as small groups allow shy people to speak up without having to compete for 'air time.'
A participant is visibly upset	Ignoring the participant hoping he/she will regain composure or not wishing to put the person in the spotlight.	Offer private space and support. Have a nominated helper who is available to provide support. Listen, reassure, and don't rush. Have tissues and refreshment and space arranged outside the room.

Taken from: The facilitators toolkit: tools, techniques and tips for effective facilitation, NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement (2009).