

# WORKSHEET

## Preparation and Improvisation for a Facilitator

by Jon Jenkins<sup>1</sup> with edits from Jan Haverkamp<sup>2</sup>

I think there are 5 kinds of preparation.

### 1. Preparing the process

One is preparation of a process that is most likely to achieve the results the client is asking for. It may be that part of that preparation is thinking of alternatives to the main process. I actually write a script out for what I will say. This I believe gives me time to carefully consider the best approach given the limited knowledge I have of the group. It also tends to align my subconscious with the way I behave in front of the group so that I am not sending mixed messages (as far as I can).

### 2. Preparing for the group

The second one is preparation by getting a feel of the group and the social dynamics of the group. Most often I only get to talk to the person making the assignment. When I can I like to talk to all of the participants or at least a representative mix of them. If I can't I have some standard questions about the group that I ask. For the most part I think this is a tacit to tacit knowledge transfer. It is not so much what is said and done in these encounters but the unconscious information I pick up.

### 3. Preparing myself

The third form of preparation is preparing myself for the program. I am not very good at this but it is critical. In fact it may be more important than the other two. I need to be aware of my deepest intention toward the client. Do I really want them to succeed? Naturally, the obvious unreflective answer is yes but I know myself and my capacity for self-deception enough that I always need to look deeper. Am I "delighted" with the assignment? Again obviously yes, but I do have that dark side. Am I detached from the outcome of the workshop? You get the idea.

### 4. Preparing the space

Several of my colleagues pointed out to the room / facilities and they are right in my experience. The fourth type of preparation has to do with creating a physical environment that encourages the process. I also couple this with my personal preparation.

### 5. Preparing the materials

The last bit of preparation is that of materials and handouts, etc.. The materials we use are aimed to enabling people to be effective in the program, to be usable after the program and to function as symbols of the session.

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## Improvisation

I am somewhat sceptical of those people who claim they improvise. At least the ones I've seen do exactly the same thing in every group, I've seen them work with.

I suppose what some improvisers do upon meeting the group, is to dig into their bag of great interventions and select one that is most important and they do that one. Depending on the response of the group and their own personal inclinations they select another intervention or they may select a type of intervention and invent one based around that type.

An intensive e-mail discussion and my natural defensiveness has raised the question in my mind, "Is there a dogma of improvisation?"

I have certainly been in situations where the program had to be redesigned for many different reasons. I have also been in programs where for whatever reason what I had scripted pretty much was what happened and sometimes word for word.

The capacity to understand what is happening to the group and to sensitively respond to it is an important aspect of the facilitation.

As you can see, I am pretty much a write out the whole script ahead of time and use that as a frame from which to respond to the group as it is when I am facilitating. When all goes belly up, I really improvise or go to pieces.

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The ZHABA facilitators collective has published a range of worksheets that can help you with facilitation. These sheets can be obtained from the Internet on <http://www.zhaba.cz>

The ZHABA facilitators collective is a group of NGO facilitators. It helps non-profit organisations to improve their work. More information on <http://www.zhaba.cz>

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