



## Organizing a Fishbowl

### Step by Step

#### Before the Meeting

- Four to five chairs are arranged in an inner circle, and the remaining chairs are arranged in a concentric circle outside the fishbowl. A few participants are selected to fill the fishbowl, while the rest of the group sits on the chairs outside. In open fishbowls, one or more chairs are left empty; in close ones all chairs are filled.

#### During the Meeting

- The facilitator introduces the topic and the participants start discussing it. The audience outside the fishbowl attentively listens to the discussion.
  - **Open fishbowl:** The initial participants seat in the inner circle and participate to the discussion for the whole last of it. Any member of the audience can, at any time, occupy the empty chair and join the fishbowl. After he/she did a comment or asked a question and received an answer he/she should leave the chair empty, so that someone else can occupy it. If no chair is free and someone wants to join the discussion he can stay behind one of the participants until the chair is left free.
  - **Closed fishbowl:** The initial participants speak for some time. When time runs out, they leave the fishbowl and a new group from the audience enters the fishbowl. This continues until many audience members have spent some time in the fishbowl. Once the final group has concluded, the facilitator closes the fishbowl.

In both cases there is an important rule to follow, no-one from the audience can express his/her opinion. In the case of the open fishbowl they have to occupy an empty chair, in the close ones they have to wait the change of participants. If someone doesn't follow the rule, the facilitator should immediately remind all the participants about it.

#### After the Meeting

- The facilitator summarizes the discussion.



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## Facilitator's Role

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The facilitator plays three main roles:

### Leadership role

- To focus on providing a direction to the group
- To stimulate and encourage constructive debate between group members
- To support members of the group, helping them to bring information, and to build new ideas
- To participate when the group is interacting poorly or in the wrong direction, by promoting new discussion
- To promote team building in a cohesive, interactive, and productive way

### Referee role

- To regulate and maintain order of the group discussion, discouraging participants from talking at the same time
- To protect members, and ensure that all contributions to the discussion are treated equally
- To deal with problems, and to control people within the group, allowing everyone to participate freely
- To manage the time, and adhere to the meeting timetable ensuring completion of the agenda

### Neutral role

- The facilitator is neutral, and pragmatic, because he takes a detached look at the discussion
- He encourages feedback, promoting discussion of each point of the meeting



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