Facilitating Groups.
What's your job?

If you are responsible for facilitating a group or groups, you have 4 main jobs:

1. **Equalise power** – ensure that everyone has an equal chance to have effective input.

2. **Draw out views** – ensure that people are 'speaking their mind' – not silently stewing, or too shy to speak out.

3. **Maintain clarity and direction** – it's very easy for conversations to become chaotic and lost, particularly in larger groups. Your job is to keep things on track.

4. **Record and synthesise information**. –many meetings can be a waste of time if information is not adequately recorded. Equally, if they end up with huge, incoherent 'shopping lists', little has been gained by them.

Below are a few simple hints for doing these jobs effectively.

Equalising power

❑   Encourage/arrange dialogue and input in small groups (7 or less)

❑   Encourage input 'around the table', hearing one idea from each person.

❑   When necessary, facilitate strongly, ensuring , for example, that
    o   'quiet' people can get heard.
    o   everyone has an equal say
    o   the 'squeaky' wheel gets heard, but doesn't dominate

❑   Give people written question sheets, so that they can give anonymous responses if they choose.

❑   Use structured facilitation processes (eg 'nominal group technique) that ensure everyone has input. (a range of processes are available)

❑   Try to have informal (eg 'tea break') time when people can talk to you in private.

❑   Consider more informal 'yarning' processes rather than always insisting on structured processes.

Drawing out views

All points above are important. In addition…………..

❑   Ensure people feel safe (consider venue, culturally appropriate processes, constrain abusive language, etc)

❑   Ensure people know what will be covered, and how.

❑   "Pay attention" to everyone in the process. (See Section ? (Working with Spirit)

❑   Adhere to the 'disciplines of relationship'. (See Section ? (Relationships)

❑   Try 'silence' in which people write down their answers to questions before group dialogue. Then encourage people to give 'one answer each' from the list they've written

❑   Ensure that the questions you want people to answer are written (eg on O'head/whiteboard) and unambiguous. (It's sometimes worth 'piloting' them on some colleagues/friends/family first to make sure they won't be misinterpreted.

Maintain clarity and direction

❑   Ensure you're clear on the desired outcomes of each meeting (eg – 'we aim to have heard the full range of community views on water management in this area'), and each session. (Display them)

❑   Ensure that input from the meeting is displayed (eg put on the wall) and, if possible, synthesised (eg, participants 'group' their 'key points' on the wall) as you go.

❑   Try to avoid over-long group feedback. (eg ask for the three key things you want to say to the full group.

- ❑ Keep people pushed for time (unless a lot of exploration is needed). Most of the 'output' from a 20 minute session comes in the last 5 minutes.

- ❑ Keep people focussed on the meeting outcomes (unless it's really 'yarning' that you want to happen)

- ❑ If you get confused about where the conversation needs to go, seek help and direction from group members. (There's usually some excellent clear thinkers in any group)

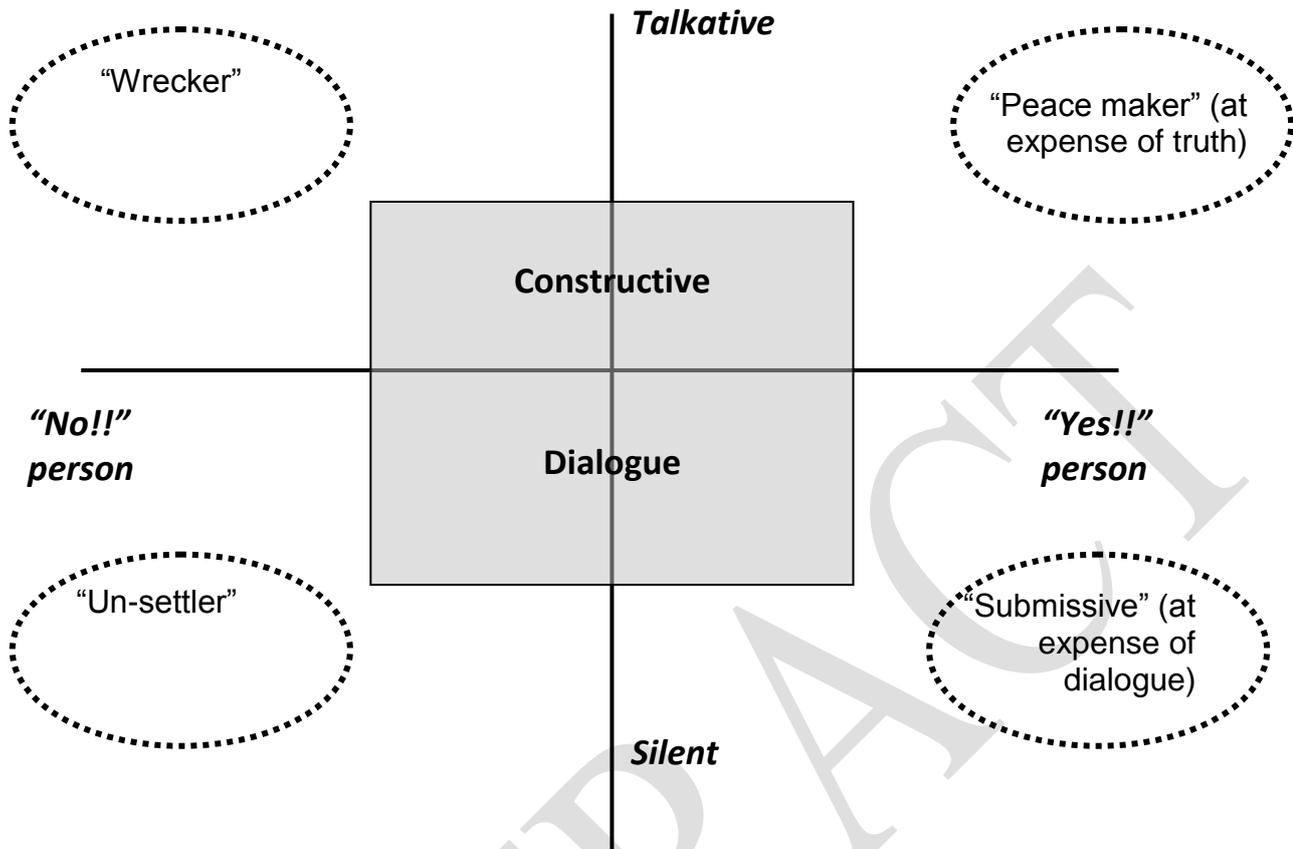- ❑ If you sense tensions, name and address them.

Record and synthesise information

- ❑ Make sure all major points are recorded.

- ❑ As far as possible, record input visibly to everyone, so they can amend what's written to reflect their real meaning.

- ❑ Check back wording on important points.

- ❑ Use 'wall grouping' and 'prioritising' techniques. (eg, groups write their 3 <u>key</u> responses to the question on A4 sheets, then put these on wall, grouping them with similar responses from other groups.

- ❑ Don't try to capture information on tapes or video's (except for illustrative purposes). It's a nightmare trying to summarise them later.

"Positions" in groups – moderating the extremes.

In groups, people can take 'extreme' positions. As a group facilitator, it is your job to 'moderate' this.

Talkative

"Wrecker"

"Peace maker" (at expense of truth)

Constructive

"No!!"
person

Dialogue

"Yes!!"
person

"Un-settler"

"Submissive" (at expense of dialogue)

Silent

Everyone has an important contribution to make. We need to "moderate" the extremes, drawing them towards a place where their input con be constructive.

All the hints under *"equalise power* `and *"draw out views"* above, help draw all people to 'constructive' place of dialogue.

You can moderate **'Yes/No"** extremes by the nature of questions. *"What are the best features of the proposed development. What are the worst features of the proposed development."*

You can moderate **"Silent"/"Talkative"** extremes by simple group processes.
"Could I have one idea from each person (round the circle)."

Note: On a particular issue, someone may take, very constructively, an extreme 'yes' or 'no' position. This is different to the 'no' or 'yes' 'predisposition' – when a person who sets out to oppose, or agree with, everything that's being said.