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Why use tools and techniques?

Tools and techniques are not just a gimmick, they:

- (1) Aid systematic working
- (2) Ensure participation
- (3) Increase productivity
- (4) Improve decision-making
- (5) Save time
- (6) Increase variety in and enjoyment of meetings

Tools combine knowledge and creativity with a logical structure. Because a whole group can be contributing at the same time, they result in better input and therefore better outputs.

The majority of the tools are 'multi-sensory' - they combine looking and listening whereas most meetings are about listening. This is much better for the way our brains work - human beings are designed to absorb information primarily through sight, not sound.

The use of tools creates activity whereas traditional meetings are passive. Activity creates engagement. Better engagement leads to improved understanding of and buy-in to the topic.

The use of tools also encourages good behaviours in meetings. When using tools everyone knows they will have an opportunity to contribute and decisions will be made based on the tool rather than opinion.

What are the tools and techniques?

The tools fall into four categories, each of which 'do what it says on the tin'.

- Tools for Planning and Organising - can be used in both everyday meetings and projects
- Tools for Analysis - mainly used in project work
- Tools for Evaluation and Decision-Making - can be used in both everyday meetings and projects
- Techniques for Productive Meetings - focused on use in everyday meetings but equally applicable to project work

General tips for using tools and techniques

- The Techniques for Productive Meetings in particular have a wide variety of everyday applications. If you want to get your organisation used to using tools, start with these.
- In project work, each project methodology will suggest which tools to use at each stage
- Read the appropriate part of the manual before using a tool, in particular the extra tips
- Read the manual again after you have used the tool - this will help you learn and improve for next time around
- The majority of the tools are designed to be used by groups and the instructions in the manual reflect this. However, it is possible to use many of them when working alone.
- Use a Facilitator for complex or tricky situations. If you are thinking about how to use the tool, you are not contributing to the topic.

Tips for using tools with groups

- Be clear about what you want to achieve
- Ensure all people involved in the subject under study are present
- Ensure everyone knows the purpose of the tool
- Run through the basics of the tool beforehand if appropriate but don't do a long teach-in. It is better to introduce each rule when necessary.
- Make sure the room is appropriately arranged
If using a flipchart or wall space, arrange the group so that everyone can participate
Consider where completed flipchart sheets will be displayed
- Ensure that there is only one person leading in the use of the tool at any one time
Ideally this should be a **UIMPROVE** Facilitator

Nervous about using tools?

There are a number of common and perfectly natural sources of nervousness when using tools in meetings or projects for the first time:

- (1) Will people think I have gone bonkers?
- (2) Will senior managers think that writing on post-its and using a flipchart is beneath them? After all they normally do serious talking around their giant boardroom table and use PowerPoint.
- (3) Will people think I've been on a course and been brainwashed by the latest fad?
- (4) Will I look stupid in front of my colleagues?

All of these are fair points but there's only one thing for it - have a crack.

Personal pay-off

If you're prepared to take the risk, the personal pay-off is going to be enormous:

- (1) Your colleagues will enjoy coming to your meetings and being involved in your projects
- (2) You will get a reputation for involving people and getting results
- (3) Your group working skills will be first class
- (4) You will be able to engage your own knowledge and creativity but at the same time be able to listen to and understand the views and knowledge of your colleagues
- (5) You will enjoy your meetings and projects because of all the above

Where to start

- (1) If you lead a team, use the Techniques for Productive Meetings and Tools for Planning and Organising at your team meeting
- (2) If you are leading any projects, use the tools when the project methodology tells you to
- (3) Set up Project Events such as Annual Planning and Project Kick-Starts as appropriate and use a Facilitator for these
- (4) When working with a Facilitator, work closely with them. Make sure you allow time for planning and review meetings and include in your review how it went with any tools you used