

Tool 51: Silence

Aim of the tool

To change the group dynamics in order to obtain a better quality of listening and decision-making.

When to use it?

In the Convergence stage: when decisions need to be made about what could work, and to refine what has been created. Also useful in earlier stages.

Why silence?

Don't underestimate the power of silence. Some of the best contributions in stakeholder meetings may come from introverts who need a bit of time to collect their thoughts, based on their active listening. As a facilitator, your task is to create a productive space for new ideas. Sometimes new ideas or innovations arrive in group discussions. But oftentimes they arrive as an afterthought – when you commute back home, when you take a walk, or when you wake up at night.

It can be a challenge to create space for this type of reflection, but it is not impossible. A few suggestions:

- Design your meeting in such a way that there are possibilities for retreat: allow enough time for breaks, stop on time to allow for a walk outside while it is still light.
- Ask people to spend 10 minutes alone with their reflection journals, and afterwards discuss their reflections with 1 or 2 other people.
- Ask in plenary to hear from someone who has not spoken much.

Meetings where something serious is at stake can at times become charged with emotions of anger and frustration. This can sometimes be good, but usually it is advisable to allow participants some time to bring their adrenaline levels back to normal. People make better decisions, and listen better when adrenaline levels are within a normal range. Asking for one minute of silent reflection on a singular question (such as “What should we do next?” or “What is needed to change this situation?”) can make a profound difference to the atmosphere and the productivity of a stakeholder meeting.

Learn more

More information on practicing and using silence:

<https://prezi.com/ffm0qcscaxff/soundofsilencews/>

Tips on how to stay calm: www.forbes.com/sites/travisbradberry/2014/02/06/how-successful-people-stay-calm/

On introvert vs. extravert facilitators: Herman Brouwer (2013) *Are introverts better at partnership brokering?* PBA Journal Betwixt and Between Issue #1, [link](#).

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