



Co-facilitation styles

Co-leading models

There are three distinct models for co-leading or co-facilitating groups: the alternate leading models, the shared leading model, and the apprentice model. The decision to utilise one of the following particular models will be dependent upon the experience of the two facilitators, their styles, and the degree to which the co-facilitators feel they can co-ordinate their activities.

1. Alternate leading

This model simply assumes that each leader will take the prime responsibility for leading parts of the group process. Alternating roles and functions are usually decided as part of the planning process. For example, if one facilitator takes responsibility for the group warm-up for one session, the other facilitator undertakes the warm-up for the following session. The challenge in alternate leadership style is to get a smooth flow in the changeover of facilitators and requires some degree of planning to make it appear seamless.

The alternate leading model is more effective where there is a different style of facilitation. It can also function particularly well where there is a need for intense focus around a particular piece of work. Changing leadership style would interrupt the particular flow of the exercise or issue being dealt with. This does not mean, for example, that the second leader is totally inactive during the process. For example, in the sessions on offence mapping, the process indicates that one facilitator takes the prime role of interviewing with the offender, while the other acts as a scribe at the whiteboard.

2. Shared leading

This model is one where the co-facilitators flow in and out of the material rather than being responsible for a designated piece of work. Although there are times when one facilitator might have the lead role, the relationship is one of trust and each can negotiate (often subtly) to move into the other's working space. The key challenge in this model is for the facilitators to be tuned in to each other in knowing when, and if, to involve themselves in a piece of work. They need to see the issue in the same way and support each other in the intervention.

One of the challenges in shared leadership for co-facilitators is to be careful not to echo the other's words: that is, for one leader to say something and the other to also feel that they have to say something regarding the issue. It is also important that the facilitators do not end up responding to each other. This can end up in a dialogue between the facilitators rather than between them and the group members.

3. The apprentice model

In this model, one leader is more experienced than the other. In this model the more experienced leader takes the major leadership role, allowing the group member, or apprentice facilitator to stay out and practice safer activities. One of the benefits of this particular model, is that it allows the least experienced facilitator to know that there is someone who can step in if things get out of hand. The experienced facilitator has the benefit of having someone to debrief with after the session.

One of the disadvantages that arises from this model is the power imbalance that can be obvious to members of the group. This can be a particular issue in co-gender and cross-cultural facilitation teams. The best way to deal with group facilitation in an apprentice model is to be clear to the group at the beginning, while at the same time being very mindful of the potential splitting and undermining that can occur towards the new group facilitator.

Your preferred facilitation style

From the information presented above what would you describe as your preferred facilitation style?

- **Alternating**
- **Shared**
- **Apprenticeship**

What would you expect to be the issues that would arise for you in working with a facilitator who has a different style to you?

Use the grid below as a starting point to discuss any potential issues that may arise from facilitators having differing styles

	Alternating	Shared	Apprenticeship
Alternating	<i>Potential issues arising from alternating/alternating styles</i>	<i>Potential issues arising from alternating/shared styles</i>	<i>Potential issues arising from alternating/apprenticeship styles</i>
Shared	<i>Potential issues arising from share/alternating styles</i>	<i>Potential issues arising from shared/shared styles</i>	<i>Potential issues arising from shared/apprenticeship styles</i>
Apprenticeship	<i>Potential issues arising from apprenticeship/alternating styles</i>	<i>Potential issues arising from apprenticeship/shared styles</i>	<i>Potential issues arising from apprenticeship/apprenticeship styles</i>

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