

# Facilitating Meetings - The Forgotten Skill in the Software World

by Ram Srinivasan  
Agile Coach and Trainer



[email@ramvasan.com](mailto:email@ramvasan.com)



[@ramvasan](https://twitter.com/@ramvasan)



<http://linkedin.com/in/ramvasan>



# Our Working Agreements

- Time-box
- Participation
  - Your participation, my participation,
  - Tweets - #nyspin, #facilitation, @ramvasan
- Electronic gadgets
- Parking lot
- Anything else?

# What are Some Reasons for Ineffective Meetings?

- Unclear objectives / lack of agenda
- Wrong participants
- Not adhering to time limits
- No one facilitating a discussion
- People do not do their homeworks
- Lack of closure to discussions
- No evaluation at the end
- Other ?

# Effective Meetings have ...

- A detailed agenda
- Group norms/working agreements
- Conflict management strategies
- Clearly assigned roles
- Creates true closure on topics
- Specific follow-up plans
- Post meeting evaluation
- Others?

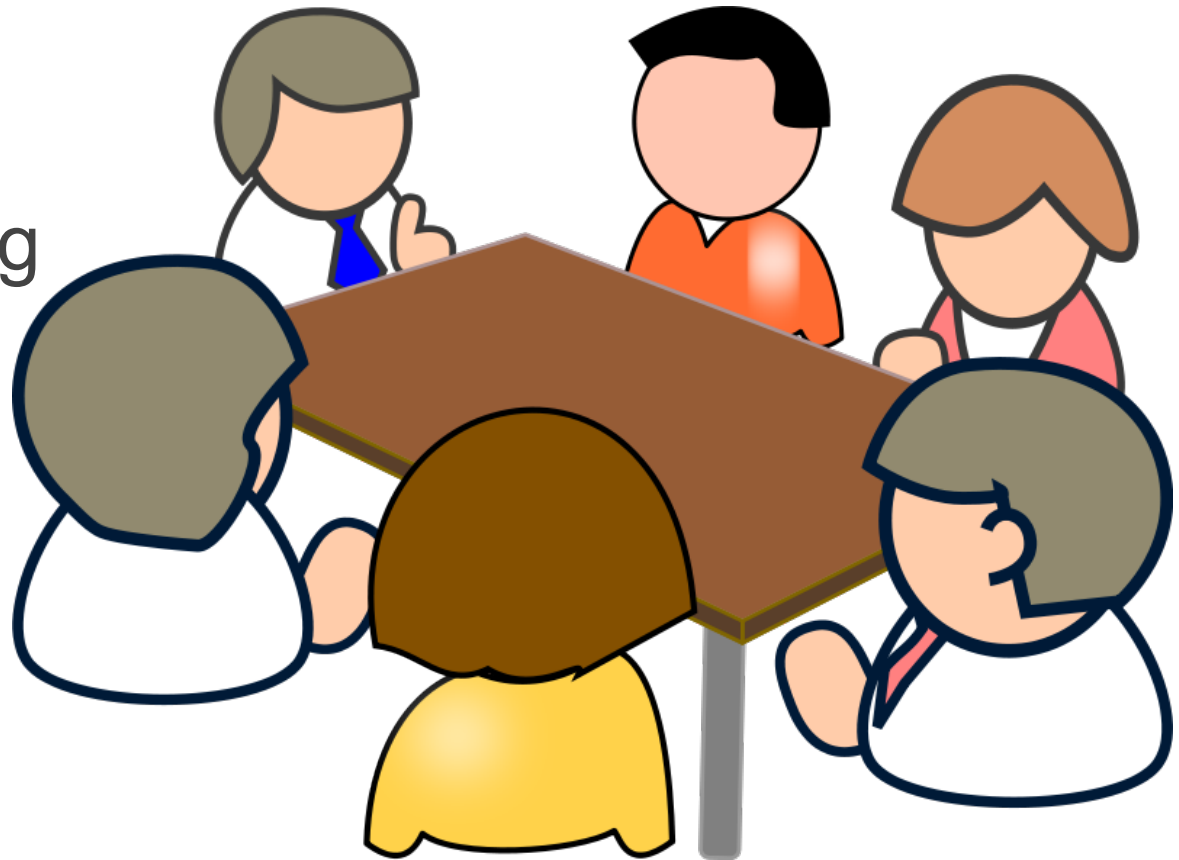
# Meeting - The Three Questions

1. What is the purpose of this meeting?
2. What is the most important question that needs to be answered by the end of this meeting?
3. What are the deliverables?



# Types of Meeting

- Status Meeting
- Work Meeting
- Hybrid Meeting



# Different Roles in a Meeting

**Sponsor:** Person who determines the meeting purpose and deliverables. He/she is impacted by the output of the meeting

**Facilitator:** Creates the meeting environment and holds the group together to help them achieve the meeting objective

**Participant:** Stakeholders who participate in the meeting. May provide input and may be responsible for deliverables

**Observer:** Should adhere to the working agreements and cannot participate in the meeting

**Timekeeper:** Keeps track of time (visual timekeeping using placards or countdown timers are better)

# What is Facilitation?

Leadership role in which decision making powers reside with the members

Facilitator guides participants through their discussions and help the group develop their own answers

Establish and maintain a high energy level in the meeting

Provide tools and process for the group

Remain neutral and not interfere with authority of members



# Who Can Facilitate?

**Internal Facilitator:** Fulltime in-house cadre or part-time volunteers

Advantages: - costs less, know more about organization history and culture, easy to access, can follow the outcome

**External Facilitators:** Consultants, OD professionals

Advantages: experience, credibility, no political/emotional baggage, can be trusted for neutrality, can take more risks

**Leaders as Facilitators:** Managers, CXOs

Disadvantages: Have a degree of power over members, difficulties switching to neutral mode

# Before the meeting

**Sponsor Interview:** Imagine that the meeting is over and you were pleased with what the team(s) produced, what is that which the teams produced which made the meeting worthwhile?

**Participants Interview:** WIIFM ?

**Logistics:** Agenda, participants, location, familiarize with electronic tools, process(how), food, etc.

Prepare the room(boards, charts, supplies) ahead of time

# Agenda of the Meeting

Orderly flow of information that will achieve the objective of the meeting

A series of questions you ask to gather info necessary to produce the meeting deliverables



# Agenda - Release Retrospective Meeting

**Facilitator:** John Doe **Participants:** ATG team, Superheros (SOA Team) and Mutual Fund Team

**Location:** 18th Floor - Manhattan Conf. Room **Time:** 10:45AM to 12:15 PM

What	How
Introductions to teams (5 minutes)	Joe (CTO) briefly talks about the past release
Review Working Agreement (10 minutes)	Revisit previous working agreement. Update the agreement, if needed
Explain the format of the retrospective (5 minutes)	How teams will participate - Different activities, logistics, etc
Brainstorm as teams - significant events during the release (20 minutes)	Timelines, Team Radar, Mad-Sad-Glad
Identify patterns / Generate Insights (15 minutes)	Prioritize using dot voting
Decide what to do (20 minutes)	SMART Goals (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Timely)
Close (5 minutes)	Return on time invested - anonymous votes

# The Meeting...



- |  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● <b>Power Start</b></li></ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● <b>Power-up Questions</b></li><li>● <b>Divergence tools</b></li><li>● <b>Power-on questions</b></li><li>● <b>Convergence tools</b></li></ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● <b>Action Steps</b></li><li>● <b>Retrospective</b></li><li>● <b>Clean up after yourself</b></li></ul>  |

# Power Start - First 5 minutes

1. **Context** - Why are we here?
2. **Continuity** - Recap from past meetings
3. **Neutrality** - A facilitator's stance
4. **Self Governance** - Team norms/ Working agreements
5. **Consensus** - I can live with that and support it



# Power-up Questions for Idea Generation

1. Begin the questions with words that create images / paint a picture/ use metaphors.

*Example:* Imagine that ....., Think about a time....

2. Tell a brief story that help team members access what they know

3. End precisely with the specific question from your agenda

# Power-on Questions for Idea Generation

Open ended and probing based on curiosity

*What are some of the things that you might consider?*

*What are some of the underlying assumptions?*

*What might the benefits of that be?*

Clarify thoughts

*It sounds like what you are saying is ....*

*Help us understand, why is this important?*

Helps participants build on each others' thoughts



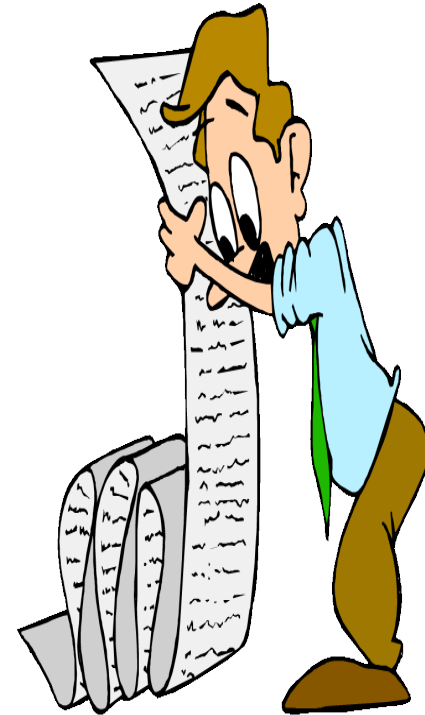
# Tools for Idea Generation

## Brainstorming



Brainstorming rules - <http://bit.ly/ScjCvt>

## Listing



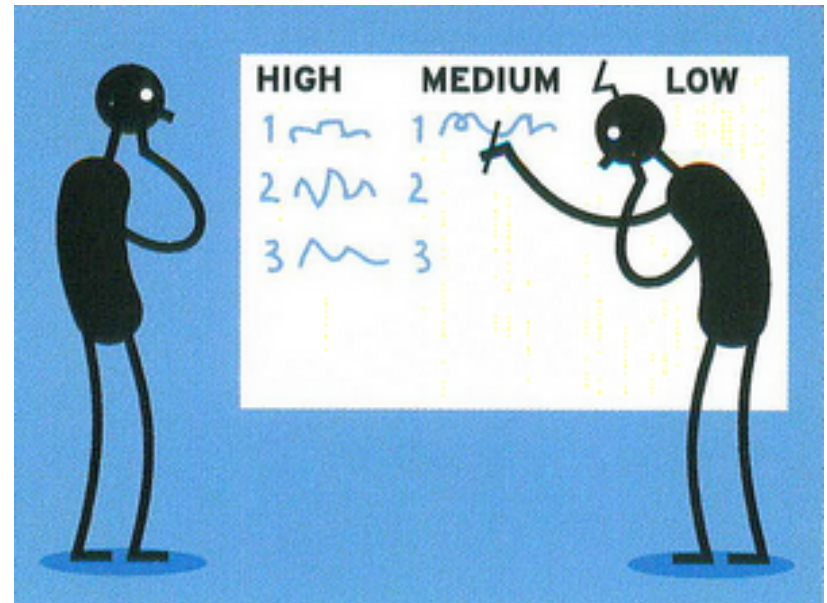
Variations for Idea Generation: Mind-maps, Mad-Sad-Glad, Radar Charts, Timelines, etc

# Tools for Convergence

## Grouping



## Prioritizing



Variations : Prioritize with dots, Voting, Fist of Five, Patterns and Shifts, Force Field Analysis, Identify Themes, etc

# Running the Meeting

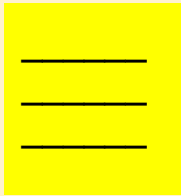
- **Everyone participates** - Round Robin, silent writing, "Can we hear from people who have not spoken so far"
- **Dysfunctional Behavior** - Never humiliate in public
- **Managing Conflicts** - Conflict Agreements, Speed Leas Conflict Model
- **Silence**

# Tools at your Disposal



# Tools at your Disposal - Parking lot

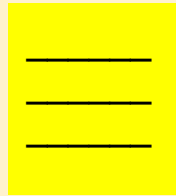
***Parking lot - Post your questions here***



\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

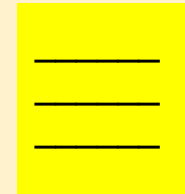
\_\_\_\_\_



\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

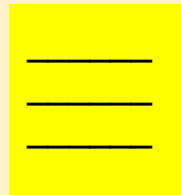
\_\_\_\_\_



\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

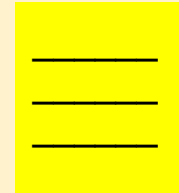
\_\_\_\_\_



\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Tip: Never skip the parking lot or use it to dodge questions

# Tools at your Disposal - Action Chart

What	Who	When

Note: Start using this tool only towards the close

# My Favorite 4s

- Manage Visually
- Volunteer Participation
- Adhere to the time box
- Keep them moving - dyads, triads, groups and exercises

# **This Meeting**

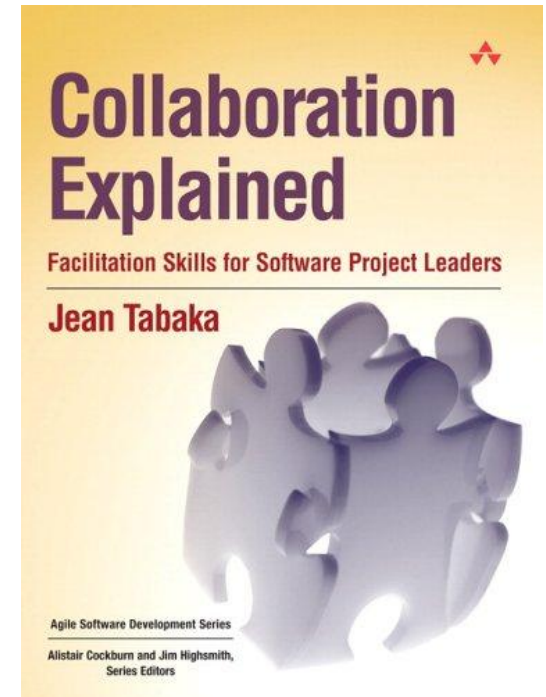
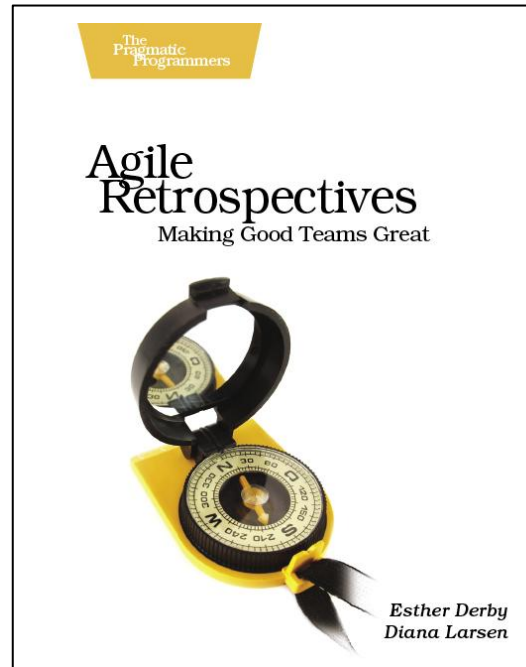
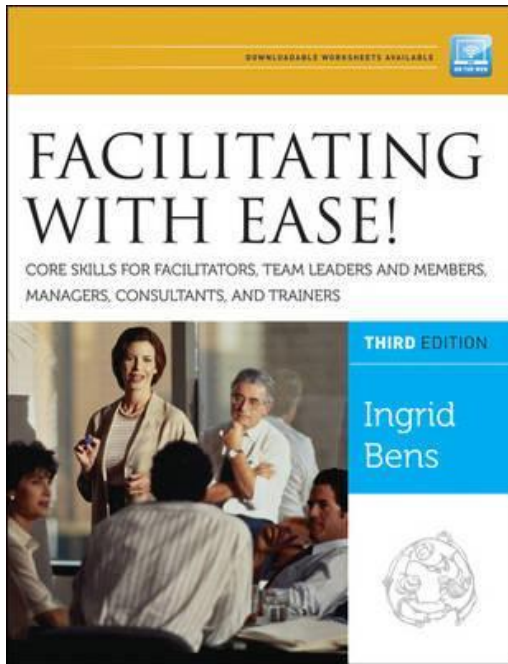




# Retrospective on this Meeting

+	△

# References



<https://delicious.com/ramvasan/facilitation>

This work is licensed under a  
Creative Commons Attribution-  
NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0  
Unported License.



Thank you



[email@ramvasan.com](mailto:email@ramvasan.com)



<http://ramvasan.com>



<http://linkedin.com/in/ramvasan>



[@ramvasan](https://twitter.com/ramvasan)

