

OPENINGS, CLOSINGS AND ENERGISERS

For openings, closings, energisers, and other experiential exercises, we need to be highly sensitive to social and cultural aspects, and also personal preferences. For example some participants may not be comfortable being touched, or closing their eyes. Consider the age and health of participants when deciding on energisers.

It is good practice to remind participants each time that they should only do what feels comfortable for them.

Openings and closings have similar objectives:

- to connect participants as a group
- to focus on the objectives of the training
- to serve as a ritual to bring openness or closure
- to create long-lasting positive memories about the workshop

OPENINGS

The best openings and closings are embedded in the culture and experience of the participants.

In advance, ask two or three participants to design a simple ceremony, based on their local culture. You may need a small budget for this, eg for flowers and candles. Discuss and agree the time allowable.

If you are working with a group from different cultures, you could ask 2 or 3 participants to organise the opening, and a different small group to conduct the closing.

Some examples include:

Opening aspirations

At the beginning the facilitator asks each participant to say (if they are a group with high trust) or write one word (ideally on sticky notes) about how they hope to feel at the end of the workshop, eg hopeful, knowledgeable, lighter, inspired.

A container is passed around and everyone adds their word. The facilitator reads out the results and commits to adjusting the facilitation in order to work towards realising these aspirations. The notes can be displayed on the wall.

Web of Support:

Resources required: ball of string or wool

(this can be adapted to be either an opening or closing)

Participants stand in a circle. Facilitator loops the string round their finger and introduces themselves, or makes some closing statements, eg about what they learned, and throws the

ball to someone else to do the same thing. When everyone has attached themselves to the string, there will be a web.

The facilitator drops their string, and then one by one, asks others to drop their string and each person can say how they feel, and others still connected can say what the impact has been on them.

The facilitator invites participants to comment on the symbolism of the web, and points out related learnings, eg:

- with a network the web is strong and protective
- if people leave, the network becomes less strong
- if a person disconnects they may feel more isolated
- connections will continue despite time and distance

Connection energisers

If participants don't know each other, it is good to use an energiser to identify links between them on the first day, so they feel more connected and trust is built, eg:

Big Wind Blow (do not use if any participant has mobility issues)

Everyone sits in a circle, the facilitator stands in the middle and says:

Big Wind Blows everyone who: (eg comes from X place, or has children, or works on women's rights, enjoys football) and everyone who fits that description has to change seats.

The facilitator also wants to take a seat, so the person left standing asks the next question.

What do you like?

The facilitator asks two participants to stand together. The first participant should say one thing they enjoy doing for relaxation, eg play video games and hold their arm out. The first person to say they enjoy video games and physically or symbolically connects to the first person. Then the 2nd person gives a different example, eg walking, and someone connects to them. The two latest connectors give another example of what they like to do (or more than one if no-one enjoys the same activity), and people connect until everyone is in a circle. The facilitator emphasises the inter-connectedness of the work everyone does as well as the activities they enjoy for well-being.

Get in the bus:

The facilitator tells everyone to imagine they are in a busy public bus station known to them all. At different moments, different buses will be announced, and everyone who relates to that bus must work out how to form a group. The facilitator then shouts out (examples):

- get in the bus for those who come from....
- get in the bus for those who have children
- get in the bus for those who work on women's rights
- get in the bus for those who enjoy football

End with something that unites everyone, eg those who are human rights defenders!

For each one, the participants have to 'find' each other, usually one person will raise their hand and shout, over here for the bus for....

The facilitator may overlap the buses, so participants rush from one 'bus' to another

CLOSINGS

Closing – offering life and appreciation

Resources required: a plant, or flower or twig

The facilitator holds a plant. Everyone is in a circle. The facilitator offers the plant as a symbol of life to the participant on their left telling the participant something they liked or were inspired by about the participant, who then passes it on to the next person with a similar message.

"I give you this plant, which symbolises life, in appreciation of your.....[your qualities which were appreciated]"

At the end, the facilitator will emphasise the importance of the HRD's work and of incorporating balance and well-being.

Closing – solidarity circle

The facilitator asks the participants to make a circle. With the permission of everyone, each participant stands close to the other and starts a slow step to the right and then to the left with their shoulders against their neighbour's shoulder. The movement should be slow. The facilitator asks the participants to close their eyes and to remember the day that they arrived to the workshop. Then to remember the experiences that they had with their colleagues, the knowledge that they have now, the new people that they know now and the relationships that they have strengthened. After five minutes of this movement in the circle, the facilitator asks the participants to lift their arms to their colleagues' shoulders so they can hug each other in a circle. At the end, trainer tells the participants to stop the movement and open their eyes and at the count of three they will turn to their right and tell their colleagues: "You are not alone" and will give them a hug. When they finish that side, they will turn to the left and will do the same to their colleagues on the left side.

ENERGISERS

The best energisers are related to the content of the workshop. Consider energising activities if participants are feeling tired, or supporting exercises before, during or after more emotionally challenging sessions, such as discussing risks for the first time in the group.

Standing up and leading some **stretching** is a good energiser.

Dancing to some relevant, local music will be energising, consider:

- dancing in a circle with each participant having the opportunity to dance in the centre
- dancing round in a circle with each participant in turn showing a dance move and the others copy this for 30 seconds before the next person shows a move
- popular YouTube dance videos

There are many useful **supporting exercises** in this **Capacitar Handout**, available in more than 20 languages:

<https://capacitar.org/capacitar-emergency-kits-to-download/>

The **Tai Chi** exercises and **Fingerholds to Manage Emotions** have been particularly appreciated by HRDs. A whole session for relaxation can be created from this handout, or the exercises can be used at different times, eg if a participant relates an upsetting experience you could use the Fingerholds.

Another supportive energiser is **Massage**. This should only be used with a group who are comfortable with touch, and is usually better towards the end of the workshop when trust has built up.

The facilitator asks the participants to stand and make a circle. Each person should turn to the right. With their permission, participants give the person ahead of them a massage from the shoulders to the lower back for about 3 minutes. Then everyone turns round and massages the person on their left.

An alternative excellent exercise which also works if touching others is not appropriate, is self tapping, along the arms, on the shoulders, the neck and the head.

Laughing is an excellent energiser, and some children's games can be used.

"Make Me Laugh" where participants are paired up and one has to try to make the other laugh, without touching them, for 2 minutes. Then they swap roles.

For the learning from this, ask the participants "in what circumstances do you need to keep an expressionless face?"

"Simon Says": the participants all face the facilitator, and the facilitator asks the participants to do certain things, eg roll your shoulders, stand on your right leg. If the instruction is prefaced by "Simon says...roll your shoulders" then the participants should do it. If the facilitator says only "Roll your shoulders", then anyone who does this is 'out' and should sit down. The facilitator should try to trick the participants, eg by standing on their left leg when they say right leg.

Ask the participants is there is any learning related to protection? One key message is not to do what everyone else is doing, but to decided for yourself. Use not only your eyes but your ears and your brain.

Electricity (re: teamwork for organisational protection planning)

The energiser is good when discussing organisation protection plans. However it is not advised if any participants have mobility issues.

Seat an even number of participants on chairs in two rows facing each other. The facilitator stands at one end and at the other end is an empty chair. The aim of the exercise is to occupy the empty chair after completing a task.

The facilitator explains:

- each row is one team
- hold the hand/s of the team members next to you so that you are all connected
- I will take hold of the hand of the 2 team members nearest me and squeeze their hands at the same time and you must imagine that this transmits a charge of electricity into each of you
- when you feel me squeezing your hand, you should squeeze the hand of the team member next to you to transmit the electricity to them, and they will do the same to the next team member
- the last team member to receive the electricity aims to sit on the chair at the end before the last person in the other team
- the aim of the game is to transmit the electricity as quickly as possibly so your team claims the chair

The facilitator needs to advise the participants “no violence, including pushing, and no cheating!”

If there are eg 12 participants, 2 rows of 6, the facilitator may conduct this 6 times, moving the last couple up to the beginning, so everyone has a turn.

Announce the results – who won?

Ask what happened during this exercise which can relate to organisation security plans?

Ask the team who won what tactics they used?

Some responses may be:

- everyone has to be clear what to do
- everyone must understand the purpose
- everyone must be fast in an emergency
- you improve if you practice
- team-building happens very quickly in an “emergency”

Visual energisers

Videos should be relevant to the topic, not contain any violence or traumatising content. Be sensitive when using local or regional material to any conflict sensitivities. Be clear about the message you wish to give by using the visuals.

Give a brief introduction, show the video and have discussions about what people learned. Using short videos is advisable as participants may settle into 'movie mode' and watch without concentration.

Awareness test

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ahg6qcgoay4>

Also known as the **Invisible Gorilla**, this video is an example of situational awareness. You will see that viewers (who haven't seen this before) may not see the "bear" walking through the group. This emphasises the idea of situational awareness the defender should have at all times to notice incidents, and not just focus on one thing.

Most related to risks and threats, but can be used anytime.

The Crocodile or the Log

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JMjXvsCLu6s>

This 1 minute video shows 2 wildebeest discussing whether something in the water is a crocodile or a log. Ask the participants to watch carefully and distinguish between which wildebeest believes what initially and which one takes the risky action.

The learning is that we must observe and use of knowledge to make decisions, and not be overly influenced by others, or try to prove things to them.

Most related to risks, threats and security planning.

Front Line Defenders Training Videos

Office Protection, 2012, 6 minutes

This older video shows HRDs as actors illustrating basic protection failures in an office.

<http://youtu.be/mCiOg1Sz1yY>

Surveillance, 2018, 11 minutes

This animation shows an HRD who comes under surveillance.

Related to sessions on risks and threats.

<https://vimeo.com/144350199>

Password: FLDanimate