

“Everybody is different, so why do we treat our participants the same way?”



Laura Zschuschen (CPF Facilitator and Manager Design Centre at Nationale-Nederlanden):

“Titia van der Ploeg helped us to understand that our meetings have to be diverse, because our participants are diverse. She showed us how to work with assignments linked to multiple intelligences. This creates a varied program, which supports the needs of different participants. We discovered that we got great results by assignments bringing in nature, pictures, musical elements and so on. And we learned an easy way to implement this knowledge in our sessions.”

“The insight that resonated most, is: give people choices in assignments. Nowadays I offer choices for my participants in every session. The result is that our participants are highly motivated. To me that is no surprise because they can use their talents and they are allowed to choose methods that fit for them.”

Increasing Motivation and Improving Results Made Easy

by Titia van der Ploeg



Stuck in known patterns

Insurance company Nationale-Nederlanden employs more than 5000 people. The company has its own team of facilitators from all over the organization. The team facilitates meetings on a great variety of topics, from marketing, innovation, information technology, team-building to reorganization. Gradually the organization has become accustomed to their standard routines.



How do I get the best out of my session and my participants?

My client described the challenges for her team of facilitators. Participants want both to be surprised, as well as feel safe. Different people have different attitudes, how to make the most of them? How to involve participants better? How to deal with reluctance, resistance or cautiousness? How to deal with “immunity” against the same facilitative methods over again? She wanted to know and show how to get better meetings.



From Howard Gardner's eight intelligences to challenging assignments

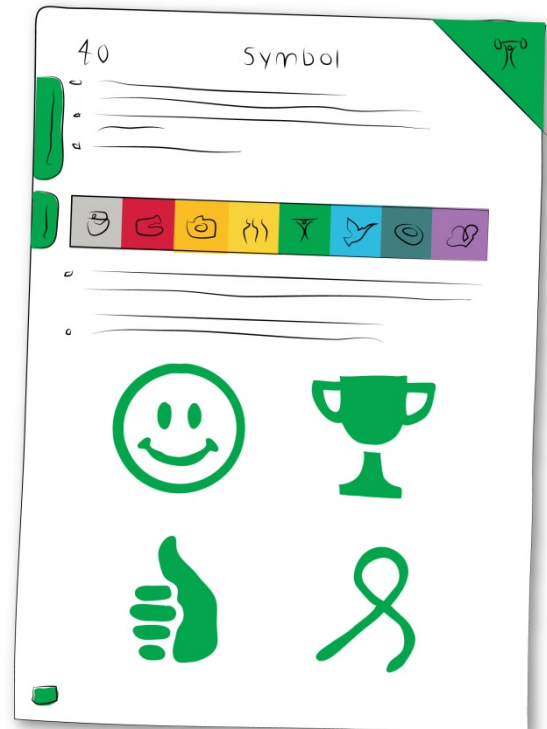
A good facilitator knows numerous ways to gather content from participants. A Brown Paper Session is a common way to do so, but the pitfall is that participants become tired of it and don't want to attend the meeting. That is why I developed Action Cards, a set of 64 ready to use working methods and assignments to help facilitators to get the best out of the groups they work with. Action Cards offer challenging assignments using two perspectives:

- Multiple intelligences of Howard Gardner¹.
- Kind of assignment: testing tasks, reflecting assignments and creative exercises.

Gardner's Eight Intelligences and Action Cards²

Gardner describes 8 different "intelligences":

- **Linguistic**
An ability to create products involving oral and written language.
- **Logical-Mathematical**
An ability to develop equations, make calculations, and solve abstract problems.
- **Spatial**
An ability to recognize and manipulate spatial images.
- **Musical**
An ability to produce, remember, and make meaning of patterns of sound.
- **Naturalist**
An ability to distinguish among different types found in the natural world.
- **Bodily-Kinesthetic**
An ability to use one's own body effectively.
- **Interpersonal**
An ability to recognize and understand other people's moods, desires, motivations, and intentions.
- **Intrapersonal**
An ability to recognize and understand his or her own moods, desires, motivations, and intentions.



¹ Howard E. Gardner, Multiple Intelligences, 2006, ISBN 978-0465047680

² You can download 10 popular Action Cards for free on <http://www.5voor9.com/10-action-cards/>.

The cards are designed for the participant and not for the facilitator. The facilitator preselects a few cards and the participants can get started right away! Each Action Card has a clear instruction and a worked out example, so participants know exactly what to do, while the facilitator relaxes and “reloads”. Participants select a method fitting their innate intelligences. In this way, the results form staged improvement.

Getting started with Action Cards

For my client, I developed a workshop based on my Action Cards. I started with a little bit of theory about the eight intelligences. Subsequently the participants were put in action. I wanted to know what they thought about the theory. I selected the cards: telling a fairy tale, writing a plea (verbal method), drawing a map of the output (naturalistic), playing a blooper (bodily kinesthetic), make a list of golden rules (logic). After about 10-20 minutes, the participants presented their results to the other group members.

The next step was an instruction about the use of the cards in a workshop. Of course I used Action Cards here too. Now for the group itself to identify how they are going to use the cards in their workshops. They found ways to use the cards themselves.

Because you've done it yourself, participants remember the session much better. In addition, it is very nice to see each other's talents and learn from each other. Participants frequently spontaneously applauded for each other, which is very unusual in the Dutch culture. They also will implement the results, because it is embedded in the assignments.

Benefits are quick reached

Laura Zschuschen says:

“Since we use the Action Cards in our workshops we identify the following results:

- *We reached a common view more quickly.*
- *The input retained also better because the information is not linked to words alone.*
- *People are now very energetic, cheerful and stay well-tuned.*
- *They leave the sessions in a positive state. Therefore they attend a session next time easier, which is very important to us.*
- *Our participants feel acknowledged, because they are allowed to deal with the content in the way they like.*



“Of course we do know that people have to leave their comfort zone in order to get the best results. But getting out of the comfort zone is not the ultimate goal. Using Action Cards prevents participants from get stuck or dropping out because of the working method. They are now highly motivated and enjoy the tasks more. The facilitator encourages the group to try something new themselves.

“It is wonderful to see that often real magic happens. My colleagues and I have never imagined that an IT engineer would chose ‘fairy tale’ accompanied by a guitar riddle. It brought some suspense and a lot of cheers in the session. When the ‘brain is open’: anything can happen!

“The Action Cards keep us sharp, sessions are never a routine anymore and my preparation is more efficient than ever. I save time not having to write instructions. I just preselect some assignments. Less experienced colleagues can mix ‘safer’ assignments and more challenging ones.”

Unimagined possibilities



The Action Cards were originally designed for educational purposes. I was really impressed by the enthusiasm of the team of facilitators, who were so open for what I had to offer. I have learned that an open attitude helps to discover extra, unplanned possibilities of this tool-kit, and of the participants using it.

I encountered singing people, moving people (even though the assignment was just producing sport metaphors), and I discovered that my session gave me an energy boost instead of being an energy drain. I am so happy and grateful that Laura embraced this way of working and now habitually gives choices to her groups. Many employees of her company have benefitted from it since the meeting.

Every day I discover new possibilities with the Action Cards. I have now developed a kind of game. The group is divided into subgroups. In the meeting room are a six different Action Cards. By throwing a dice they should pick up an Action Card. The winner is the first subgroup that all action cards has ended. Thereafter it is harvesting of results.