Group Dynamics: Task and Maintenance Roles

People play different roles in groups and can play multiple roles. Task and maintenance roles are important for facilitators to be aware of and utilise effectively.

Task Roles Help move the project, decision, task along	Maintenance Roles Help nurture/build the relationships in a group
Initiating Information of Opinion Seeking Clarifying Summarizing Consensus Testing	Encouraging Harmonizing Expressing Group Feelings Gatekeeping Compromising Standard Setting and Testing

What	When	How
TASK Roles: Initiating		
Define group purpose; suggest procedure to identify key elements/tasks in path to reach purpose	At the beginning of a meeting, when the meeting bogs down, or when the group needs direction or new direction	*Define the purpose; suggest a method or process for accomplishing the purpose; provide a structure for the meeting.* [SEP] *"It seems like we are being asked to ...",* [SEP] *"Does it seem like a good idea to begin by...?"*
TASK Roles: Information Or Opinion Seeking		
Request facts; seek relevant information about a question or concern; ask for opinions ideas, or suggestions.	Problem solving, decision making, action planning, group discussion.	*Ask for more facts; collect data; seek individual opinions, ideas and suggestions. "What are the likely solutions?",* [SEP] *"Mary, what do you think of that idea?",* [SEP] *"What else do we need to know before we can proceed?"*
TASK Roles: Clarifying		
Listen, reflect ideas and suggestions; clear up confusion; indicate alternatives and issues before the group; give examples, define terms.	Any time the group discussion becomes too vague, too general or lacks focus; when a lot of information has been put out.	*Ask for more information; build on the ideas of others; clarify an idea based on your understanding; try to develop timid suggestions and half stated ideas into fully developed possibilities. "What I think I hear you saying is ___",* [SEP] *"Robert, can you explain your idea a bit more,"* [SEP] *"Cecilia, does your idea relate to what Luis said earlier?"*
TASK Roles: Summarising		
Pull together related ideas; restate suggestions after the group has discussed them; offer a decision or conclusion for the group to accept or reject.	At each transition in the meeting, when many different ideas or proposals are being considered, when the group gets off track; at the end of a meeting/ discussion.	*Restate points, decisions, action plans or common themes of the discussion; remind the group of the process or method being used. "Let's take a minute to look at the main themes that are arising in our discussion"* [SEP] *"It looks like the main points being raised are ___"* [SEP] *"Each person needs to offer a suggestion before we begin an open discussion."*
TASK Roles: Testing for Agreement		
Check with group re level of agreement reached and how ready the group to make a decision.	Problem solving, decision making, action planning.	*Poll the group on a decision to determine whether an agreement already exists.* [SEP] *"Is there agreement that...?" "Are there any objections to ....?" (ask in the +ve and also in the -ve)*

What	When	How
MAINTENANCE Roles: Encouraging		
Be friendly, warm, and responsive to others; accept others & their contributions; give opportunity for each to contribute/be recognized.	Regularly.	*Give recognition for contributions to the group, point out accomplishments of the group. "That was a really good suggestion, Chris. Thanks." "We have accomplished a lot today. Terrific."*
MAINTENANCE Roles: Harmonising		
Reduce tension, get people to explore their differences; work to reconcile disagreements.	When the group cannot reach consensus, when conflict of ideas, opinions or personality is prevents progress.	*Articulate the common elements in conflicting points of view. Remind of common purpose. "What can we all agree on?" "We seem to be stuck. What can we do to move discussion along?"*
MAINTENANCE Roles: Expressing Group Feelings		
Sense feelings, moods, relationships within the group; share one's own feelings with other members.	When the group is having trouble making a decision, when you sense a conflict in the group, as a check-in to see how the group is doing.	*Verbalizing what you see as the feelings, mood, tension in the group. Openly acknowledge your own feelings about what is going on in the group. "I am sensing that there is some tension in the room, does anyone else feel it?" "It seems like some people have withdrawn from this discussion. Is that something we could discuss?"*
MAINTENANCE Roles: Gatekeeping		
Help to keep communication channels open: facilitate the participation of others, suggest procedures that permit sharing remarks.	Whenever you want to hear from the more silent members of the group, whenever you want to prevent a participant from dominating the discussion.	*Ask an individual for their opinions or the information; be sensitive to non-verbal signals indicating that people want to participate; when a person monopolizes the conversation, ask others for input "Jeff, did you want to share something?" "Thanks for your input, Robin. I invite others now to say what they think."*
MAINTENANCE Roles: Compromising		
When your own ideas or status is involved in a conflict, offer a compromise that yields status; admit error, modify ideas in interest of group cohesion or growth.	When the group is stuck, when trying to make a decision and there are opposing views.	*Offering suggestions for getting unstuck; asking the group members to figure out a compromise. "I guess this method may not be the best for accomplishing this task. Shall we try Kim's idea?" "I feel like we are stuck with two opposing views, what can we do to reach a compromise?"*
MAINTENANCE Roles: Establish Agreements		
Check whether the group is satisfied with its procedures; suggest new procedures when necessary.	When the group first meets together, whenever the norms that are developing prevent the group from functioning effectively.	*Help group define its ground rules; remind group of the standards they established for themselves anytime those rules are ignored or broken. "How do we want to operate as a group?" "Seems like our ground rules have been forgotten. Should we take a few minutes to revisit them?" "I just want to remind you of the ground rules we set up in the beginning."*

HINDERING Roles

Sometimes individuals act in ways that hinder the group's process and progress. Addressing these behaviours early and reflecting these behaviours back on individuals so that they take responsibility for them is important for the group performing.

Dominating behaviour: Asserting authority or superiority to manipulate the group or certain members; interrupting contributions of others; controlling through use of flattery or being patronising.	**Possible Solution:** *Establish a procedure such as round robin whereby each person contributes one idea to the discussion and then must wait until every other group member has opportunity before contributing again; interrupt the dominator, ask him/her to summarize the point quickly so that others can add their ideas, too. "Thank you for giving us all those ideas, Erin. Let's hear from others in the group now."*
Withdrawing: Removing self psychologically or physically from the group; not talking; answering questions only briefly.	**Possible Solution:** *Do not let conflicts remain unresolved; talk with the person privately to find out what is happening; direct questions to and solicit ideas from the avoider so this person stays involved. "Carol, I have noticed that you haven't been as involved in the group lately. Is everything O.K.?"*
Put downs: Putting down others' ideas and suggestions; deflating others' status; joking in a barbed or sarcastic way.	**Possible Solution:** *When your group meets, review ground rules with them, seek agreement that all ideas will be accepted; reinforce this agreement if a put down is spoken. "You have a point, but we need to work together and respect each person's contribution, not attack each other's ideas."*
Uncooperative Behaviour: Disagreeing and opposing ideas; resisting stubbornly the group's wishes for personally oriented reasons; using hidden agenda to thwart group progress.	**Possible Solution:** *Incorporate statements in the original guidelines that deal with cooperation and interruptions, encourage this person to explain reasons behind his/her objection; look for any aspect of the position that supports the group's ideas so that this person moves from left to center field; refocus his/her participation as a recorder or process observer; ask the group to deal with this uncooperative behavior. "Lets take a few minutes to revisit the ground rules now." "Sandy, that is an interesting view. Could you explain how you came to those conclusions?" "What's the "win-win" outcome you are most ambitious for from this discussion?"*
Side Conversations: Private side conversations.	**Possible Solution:** *Set guidelines and expectations at the beginning of the meeting, stop the meeting and ask those involved in the side conversation to share what they are talking about with the group, stop the meeting and comment that it is difficult for you to hear the other discussion or to concentrate on the topic at hand with side conversations occurring; privately talk with the distracters and discuss their expectations for the meeting's topics; empower others to confront the distracters with how these side conversations keep everyone from concentrating on the group's discussion. "I am having trouble focusing on the discussion with the side conversations going on. Is anyone else experiencing this?" "It is difficult to focus on the discussion with side conversations going on. Can we agree that we will all focus on the main discussion?" "I sense we are losing people's attention and interest, can we do a check-in to see where people are, on this topic?"*