**How to Deal with Specific Types of Participants?**

**Ramblers**

* Avoid discouraging talker, encourage the others to participate more
* Interrupt the person with a question directed to someone else
* Acknowledge the comment and involve others: “Joe, that was an interesting insight… Barbara, what are your views on this issue?”
* Saying “please take 10 seconds to complete your thought so we can hear from others.”
* Before the meeting or during a break, enlist the help of the excessive talker in encouraging the silent participants to open up
* Establish ground rule to ensure equal participation by all members; encourage participants to help monitor
* Give the participants equal number of poker chips, each worth 30 seconds of talking time

**Flounderers**

* Reiterate the goals and timetables of the group
* Revisit the group charter
* Focus on a concrete action plan with concrete roles and responsibilities
* Ask ‘What are the barriers for moving forward?’
* Set clear time expectations for decision making
* Re-examine past unfinished business
* Assign individuals with agenda items and action items

**Complainers and Negativitists:**

* Listen even though it may be difficult
* Acknowledge by paraphrasing the complaints
* Refocus the discussion on the possible solutions, rather than on the problems.
* Do NOT agree with the complaints/comments
* Avoid getting drawn into their attitude
* Be prepared to interrupt and take control of the situation (these guys love to ramble)
* Ask the group “does anyone else feel as strongly about this issue?”
* Use limiting responses that pin the complainer to specifics
* Be patient
* Be prepared to take on the project with support from others
* If needed, meet with person outside of group activities to clarify mission of group and explore ways to constructively work together
* Using humor: “that sounds terrible, how long has it been like that?”
* Ask them to give at least one solution for each “problem” they identify

**Indecisives/Silent-unresponsives**

* Don’t place them in an uncomfortable situation
* Allow for enough time to process information
* Pause for long periods, inviting them to fill the void
* Bring issues out in the open and make it easy for them to be direct
* Use small group activities to help them solving problems or ask all participants to answer questions
* Watch for signs that the pressure to make a decision may be overloading them
* Reinforce commitment to hear from all participants
* Discuss one-on-one after the meeting

**Super-agreeables**

* Ask them to explain their reasoning
* Make honesty non-threatening; they sometimes don’t agree, but are afraid to tell you
* Don’t allow them to make unrealistic commitments that they can’t fulfill
* Re-emphasize the ground rule to allow for disagreement
* Break down in small groups or one-on-one exercises

**Hostile-aggressive**

* Stay positive
* Acknowledge what you have heard
* Don’t make it personal even if you are personally attacked
* Stand up for yourself, without being threatening
* Speak from your point of view
* Reiterate the goals and objectives of the meeting
* Refer to a post meeting conversation

**Dealing With Difficult Behavior**

Learning is about change, and sometimes occasions will arise in which participants or group dynamics create difficult behaviors situations. These behaviors could be a result of resistance to change, misunderstanding, different styles between participants or the faculty, or other factors. The following steps are most often effective in dealing with difficult behaviors.

**Prevention**

• Work done before a group or workshop convenes and work done during the first session can prevent many problems from ever occurring. Talk with participants before the first session and address problems which you think might occur. Build ground rules at the first session to define appropriate group norms and learning behavior. Remind participants that they are responsible for upholding and enforcing the ground rules.

**Non-intervention**

• Usually, when someone is acting in a difficult way, the first step you should take is not to intervene at all. Pause a moment and see if other participants handle the situation. Oftentimes, participants will bring others into line by referring to the Ground Rules, or by simply asking them to stop what they are doing.

• If the behavior continues, and no one else steps in, you might have to intervene. If the behavior is destructive like a personal attack, intervene immediately. Use your judgment about when it is appropriate to intervene. Intervening too frequently can inhibit learning and problem solving behavior among adults.

**Low-level intervention**

• Relatively non-threatening techniques designed to short circuit the difficult behavior will frequently take care of the problem. A reference back to the ground rules may be all that is needed. Something as simple as a shift in eye contact or asking for input from another learner may stop the behavior.

**Medium-level Intervention**

• If the problem behavior is chronic, you may choose to talk with the individual between modules or at a break and offer constructive feedback. Your goal is to create an informal contract in which the person agrees to desired behaviors. This may require you to offer certain agreements, too. For example, “I will try to avoid teaming you with Mary on assignments again, but you need to agree to stop arguing with her during the session.”

• If the participant does not respond to your feedback or suggestions, a more assertive intervention may be called for.

**High-level Intervention**

• If all else fails, you may have to deal with the offending behaviors in the presence of other participants. This is not a step to be taken lightly. A great deal of thought and preparation has to precede such a confrontation. Avoid blaming. Use constructive feedback and focus on problem solving. Stay focused on the behavior. Keep personalities and stereotypes out of it. This is a high-risk intervention. It can alienate others, even though they may agree with you. It can, however, be very effective in halting problem behaviors.