A GUIDE TO
WORKSHOP DESIGN

Designing a workshop is super fun.

A workshop is a mechanism that can allow us to think differently by interacting with other people. It is a forum that enables us to share thoughts or build ideas that you might otherwise struggle with if you (or your research participant) are on your own.

This guide is designed to guide your workshop design – not to tell you what activities to run :) it covers:

- Setting up the right foundations
- Designing for the people in the room
- Considerations for the activities you design
- Considerations for co-facilitation
- Tips for setting up a workshop
- Handy checklist

Awesome workshops looks easy - this comes from a really good design that is rooted in a strong purpose aligned to the outcomes you're trying to achieve. ***Therefore, we have to be clear from the beginning as to why this workshop is important and what outcomes we need to reach. This is our starting point.***

Start by setting out the foundations for your design

Setting up the right foundations is important because you may need to adjust your design during the session for various reasons. Being really clear on the outset about why it is you are running your workshop and your outcomes will enable you to keep the big picture in mind and improvise if need be.

HOT TIP: Focus on the outcome over the activities!

Grab some paper and a pen and really think about these questions either individually or, better yet, in a team so you're all aligned on why you're doing a workshop to begin with.

Ask yourself:

- **Why are we designing a workshop?**
  - Is there another method we should be considering?
  - Are we seeking to hear from a few people at the same time and encourage discussion?

- **What is the purpose of the workshop?**
  - Why are we doing this activity?
  - What is the intention of this session?

- **What outcomes are you trying to achieve with the workshop and why?**
  - How will we know if we have succeeded?
  - What will this session do?
  - What is it you need from this workshop in order for you to continue your work?

Think about the people you are designing for

Once you've set the foundation for your workshop it's now time to focus on the people, both participating in the workshop but also the people who are facilitating the workshop. This allows us to think about the mood, atmosphere and emotions we want to create to best complement the outcomes we are setting out to achieve.

Ask yourself:

• What feeling do you want the participants to feel while they participate in your workshop?

- Do you want them to feel engaged, creative, happy, listened to etc. Use this as reference when you start designing to ensure that your workshop design is hitting those feelings.

• How do you want the participants to feel after the workshop?

- Do you want them to feel empowered, thoughtful, relaxed etc.?

• How do you want to be as a facilitator? What is your stance?

- Do you want to be energetic, funny, serious, fast paced, etc.?

• How can you enable your participants to connect with one another?

- How are you going to ask people to introduce themselves?

  Example: In Aboriginal culture, you are asked to introduce yourself by telling the story of your heritage–not what you do. This allows people to connect and share through anecdotes, emotions and, ultimately, being human.

Consider the flavour–or theme of your design here–perhaps there is a way of asking people to introduce themselves within the theme of your workshop. Is your workshop about the future of work? Ask them to introduce themselves by telling everyone in the room what they want to be when they grow up.

• How do you want to connect and engage with the participants?

- Do you want to share your own personal stories? Do you want to hang out with the participants during the breaks, do you want to go out for a drink afterwards etc.?

• What are the ways you can allow for people to engage in different types and modes of thinking?

- Generally, there's always a really loud person and a quiet one. Consider the different ways you might engage them to contribute to the discussion through different activities and mechanisms. It's also good to mix up left brain and right brain thinking too. Left brain is analytical and logical thinking, and right brain is creative thinking.

  Example: Sometimes we ask people to draw or create their response using lego or play-dough–even pipe cleaners. We give them a few minutes to think quietly first as right brain thinking requires deep thinking before responding.

Now comes the fun part–designing your activities!

The beauty of design is our type of research is generative and creative. Your workshop participants are getting together to work and design something. Remember to curate the space and your own style of facilitation to maintain the right energy needed for the activity you are asking people to engage in.

Always start with an icebreaker

Now we know icebreakers can be really terrible and awkward–no one likes those, so you have a great opportunity to show people how great icebreakers are done!

Why are icebreakers important you ask? Well, because you need to help people shift into the right headspace and energy to engage in your workshop. They may have just walked out of an awful meeting or still be thinking about the emails they need to respond to. It's important we help people shift to be present for the workshop.

Design for flow and good energy

Really great workshops feel seamless, engaging and fun. Change things up to keep people engaged. You can do this by designing your activities in such a way that they have a different pace or require people to move – ask people to sit, stand, walk around and get some energy going.

HOT TIP: Take the temperature of the room. Are people low or high on energy? Are people frustrated or in a state of excitement? By deliberately understanding how people are feeling in the workshop allows you to shuffle things around to change the flow or energy.

HOT TIP: Speaking about energy, always run ideation sessions when people are naturally energetic like in the mornings or before lunch (be mindful that there is a natural low in energy when people have just eaten). Avoid running highly creative sessions in the evening time when people are tired from a long day.

More than one facilitator? Determine how you will work together

This is really critical when designing your workshop. Together as a team, you need to consider the roles you need to play in the room, for the participants, and for each other.

Consider:

- **Who will be leading the workshop?**
  Generally it's easier and more seamless for participants if there is one person responsible for guiding the process and commanding the space in the room. It's harder to share this role if you aren't used to working together as a team. In high performing teams, sharing this role is very easy.

- **Who will be supporting and nurturing the group?**
  It's important someone is in charge of looking after the group. Is there enough water, nibbles, catering etc.

- **Who will be keeping time?**
  Assigning a time keeper is important, and is usually not the person leading the workshop as they need to be focused on guiding the group and the big picture.

- **How will you communicate with one another?**
  It's important to determine the language and means you will use to communicate with one another–will you use signals if you think something is going wrong, will you come together to have check-ins while participants are busy with activities, etc.?

HOT TIP: If you are co-facilitating with others, take some time to consider your style of facilitation and the different ways you go about guiding people. This is important so that you don't disrupt participants with too many different suggestions and approaches that may not feel aligned. Key to sharing facilitation with someone else is to listen openly to the participants and step in when needed, and to not make any assumptions.

Setting up your workshop, some handy tips and tricks

On time

- **First of all everything you plan always takes much longer in practice then what you design on paper** be mindful of this and always allow yourself enough time for each activity. As a rule of thumb add 5-10 minutes of activity frame-up before you start the actual activity. This way you're making sure that everyone in the room knows what the next steps are, what they have to do, and they have time to ask you clarifying questions.
- **Allow time for reflection after each activity.** Instead of rushing through to the next activity take some time to ask people what people got out of what they just did - this is an opportunity to connect with how people are feeling in the workshop and if that's aligned to what you had set out from the beginning. It's also an opportunity for you to hear reflections that might not had appeared in your actual activity.

On framing:

- **Set up ground rules for the workshop** such as 'be open', 'this is a safe space' or 'be collaborative' or even more practical rules such as 'no mobiles'. By framing up some good ground rules from the beginning you're deliberately designing the culture they group needs to embrace. Instead of ground rules you can also frame it up as what mindset do you want people to embrace for this workshop.
- **Mention admin stuff** such as where is the bathroom, what's the wifi password, when will we have breaks etc. If you do this from the beginning you don't have to answer these questions during the workshop.

When in Australia:

- **Always start the workshop by acknowledging the traditional owners of this land.** You can use this as a guide for what to say, wherever you are in Australia:
  I wish to acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Start Islander people as the first Australians and the proud traditional custodians of the lands upon which we live and work. We pay respects to their Elders, past, present and future.

- You can use this as a guide for what to say when holding workshops in Melbourne:
  I would like to acknowledge the Wurundjeri people who are the traditional custodians of this land. I would also like to pay my respects to Elders past and present of the Kulin nation, and I extend that respect to other indigenous people who are present.

  For more knowledge about Acknowledgement of Country, visit:
  Source: *https://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/spirituality/welcome-to-country-acknowledgement-of-country#ixzz5U3i0SDiF*

And the grand finale:

- **Less is more - don't feel like you need to run many different activities.** Often you get enough depth from just one activity followed by a great reflection round. If you feel that your design is tight on time, it probably is. Let go of some things and reconnect to the outcomes you're trying to achieve.

Checklist for workshops at Huddle Melbourne

We recognise this is specific to Melbourne, but you may find it handy for other locations.

- Book a room for the workshop.
- Inform Huddlers and others sharing our space when you're running the workshops.
- Send out invitations to participants with location, what to bring, dress code, general info about the workshop and if they have any dietary requirements.
- Send out a reminder to the participants a few days before the workshop.
- If you're co-facilitating with a client book in some time with them to prep them for what is about to happen. Introduce them to listening channels and how to ask really good and open questions.
- Check stationary at least a week before your workshop to make sure that you have everything you need such as post-it notes, blu tag, butcher's paper, labels for name tags, sharpies etc.
- Order catering (if needed) from our preferred caterers. Make sure to have plates, cutlery and serviettes ready for the catering if you need it.
- Buy lollies or nuts for brain energy for the participants.
- Make sure you have coffee, tea, water, sugar, milk, plenty of glasses/mugs and spoons for the participants.
- Make sure you have post-it notes with the code for the wifi.
- Clean up the space in which you're running the workshop. We want our participants to feel at home at our home. Ask Huddlers and others who share our space to tidied up prior to the workshop, this includes our common areas, the kitchen, the make room, etc.
- Print out all the material you need the day before your workshop and check off on a list that you've remembered everything.
- If you use a slideshow it's a good idea to test run it on the monitor the day before so you know how to set it up and if it looks how you intended.
- Print signage for the workshop that indicates to the participants where to go.
- Set up the room at least a few hours before (even the day before). This way you'll discover if you've forgotten anything.