



FACILITATING PROFESSIONAL WARGAMES

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Background

- Independent consultant, ex-RAF (1977 – 1999)
 - Work for US DoD, UK MOD, NATO and others
- Long experience in defence
 - Operations, command, policy, research, testing, training, evaluation, analysis
- Almost as long experience of professional wargaming
 - First education game 1979 (Royal Navy School of Maritime Warfare ‘Tactical Floor’)
 - Player, analyst, designer for analytical games since 1997
- Trained Facilitator
 - 20 years experience
 - Lead Facilitator for US-led multi-national wargaming programme from 2007 - 2025
- Still learning!
 - *“He who learns but does not think is lost. He who thinks but does not learn is in great danger” – Confucius*



Content

- What is Facilitation?
- The Task
- Skills and Tools
- Questions



Wargaming

- *“A simulation, by whatever means, of a military operation involving two or more opposing forces, using rules, data, and procedures designed to depict an actual or assumed real life situation.”*
- “A warfare model or simulation, using rules, data, and procedures, not involving actual military forces, and in which the flow of events is affected by, and in turn affects, decisions made during the course of those events by players representing the opposing sides.”

NATO AAP-06

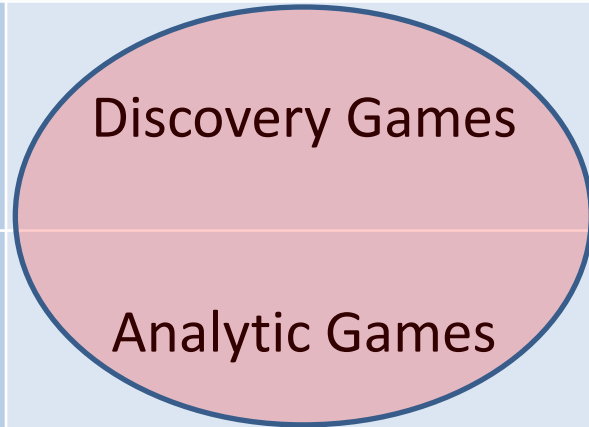
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Where Do Facilitators Fit In Wargaming?

<i>Game Type</i>	<i>Professional</i>		<i>Hobby</i>
Purpose	Creating Knowledge	Conveying Knowledge	Entertainment
Unstructured Problem	Discovery Games	Education Games	Role-Playing Games (e.g. Behind Enemy Lines)
Structured Problem	Analytic Games	Training Games	Board Games (e.g. Risk)



Exploratory Games

Spot The Difference

- Education, training and entertainment games often need adjudication: Umpires
- In exploratory games, no-one knows yet what the answers might be, so adjudication is rarely appropriate
- Exploratory games are ‘thought experiments’ and need controls and/or catalysts: Facilitators
- The two jobs are very different



Facilitation

“The act of helping other people to deal with a problem or reach an agreement or solution without getting directly involved in the process or discussion”

Facilitator

“An individual who enables groups and organisations to work more effectively; to collaborate and achieve synergy. He or she is a ‘content neutral’ party who by not taking sides or expressing or advocating a point of view during the meeting, can advocate for fair, open, and inclusive procedures to accomplish the group's work”

“One who contributes structure and process to interactions so groups are able to function effectively and make high-quality decisions. A helper and enabler whose goal is to support others as they pursue their objectives”

“A meeting or workshop leader who creates an environment where every participant has the opportunity to collaborate, innovate, and excel”

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Helping players to achieve outcomes that they otherwise might not be able to

The Facilitator's Task

- The job is to help keep the game on track
- Facilitators monitor progress, pose questions, steer discussions, and collate and summarize the positions the players have reached
- Their aim is to ensure that the needs of the analysts, the players, and the schedule are balanced
 - They work with the key stakeholders to make sure that the game is making the necessary progress at an appropriate pace
- **They have no opinions of their own!**
 - Their role is to help the players form theirs

In short, facilitators are the oil in the machine



In A Nutshell

- The facilitator's principal job is to help the participants take ownership of the process
- While making sure they're working on the right issues
- And keeping them in the right frame of mind to be both creative and effective
- It's not always easy...



The Balancing Act

- There is always a three-way balance needed between the needs of the sponsors, the analysts, and the player groups
- Without good facilitation, you're quite likely to achieve this balance by getting all of them equally unhappy



The Context: Complex Games

- The techniques I'll talk about have been developed over a number of years and used extensively in a wide range of games
- The game programmes are set in hypothetical future epochs
 - So they are by nature exploratory and analytical
 - They cover all situations from global competition, through crisis, to full conflict, with a range of state and non-state adversaries and other parties
- And no game is ever repeated...
- Plus many of the sponsors, players, and delivery team rotate in and out over quite a short time
- A strong and stable 'core team' of Designers, Analysts, Support Players and Facilitators is essential

Game Play

- The programmes typically run on a one or two-year cycle, with a number of gaming events per cycle
 - Each game can last up to 5 days, with up to 100 or more participants
- The players may come from a wide range of nations and organisations, on a global basis
 - They are split between Defence and Foreign Policy, plus Legal and others
- The games are as realistic as possible in both the situation presented and the game rules, in order to generate the player immersion that is critical to success
- ***Enabling and supporting that effective immersion is the Facilitator's prime directive***

All Events are Different

- The role of the Facilitator will vary from event to event
- But there will always be four parts to the job



- Where the balance lies depends on the type of gaming event being facilitated
- Events might sometimes include a number of phases, so the job can be quite varied
- Different approaches may also be necessary due to the experience or characteristics of the players

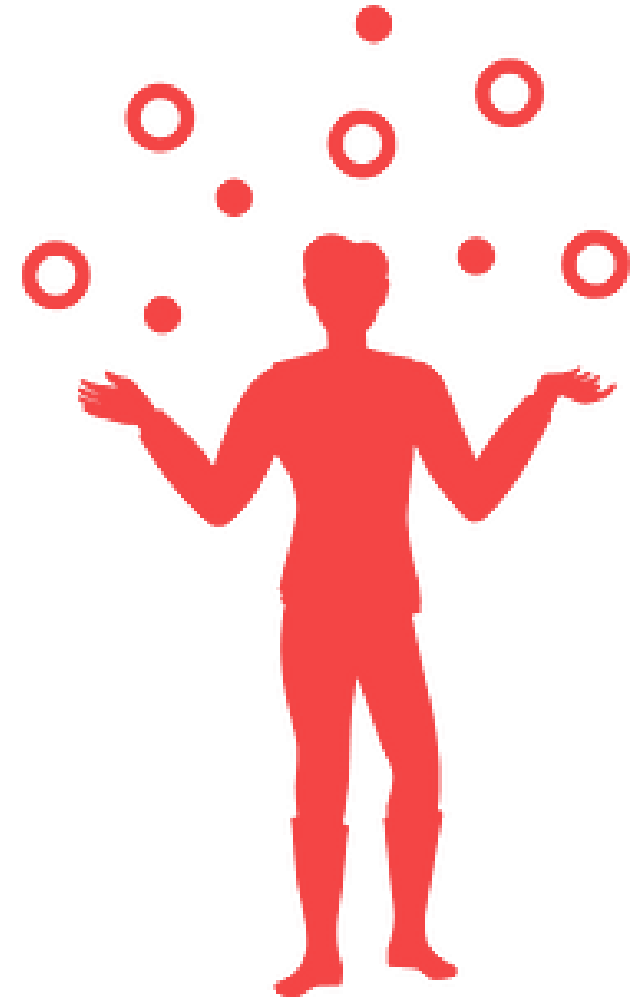
Techniques

- The next slides will cover some of the skills and tricks you'll need to develop should you want to take up facilitation
- Perhaps more importantly, they are the same skills that you should expect as a sponsor, designer or player from anyone facilitating your own game



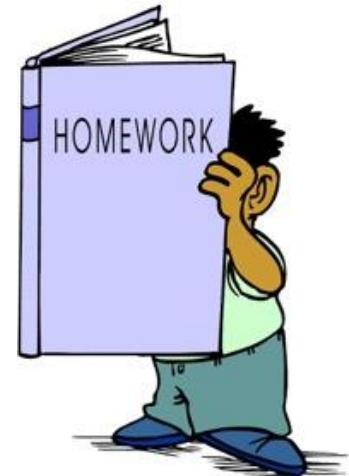
Core Skills

- Ability to listen
- Ability to think on the fly (while listening)
- Language skills
 - Able to speak slowly, communicate clearly
 - Without jargon, acronyms, idiom or slang
- Understanding of the topic
- Understanding of the objectives
 - But without personal or organisational agenda
- Cultural and social awareness
- And last but not least: teamwork



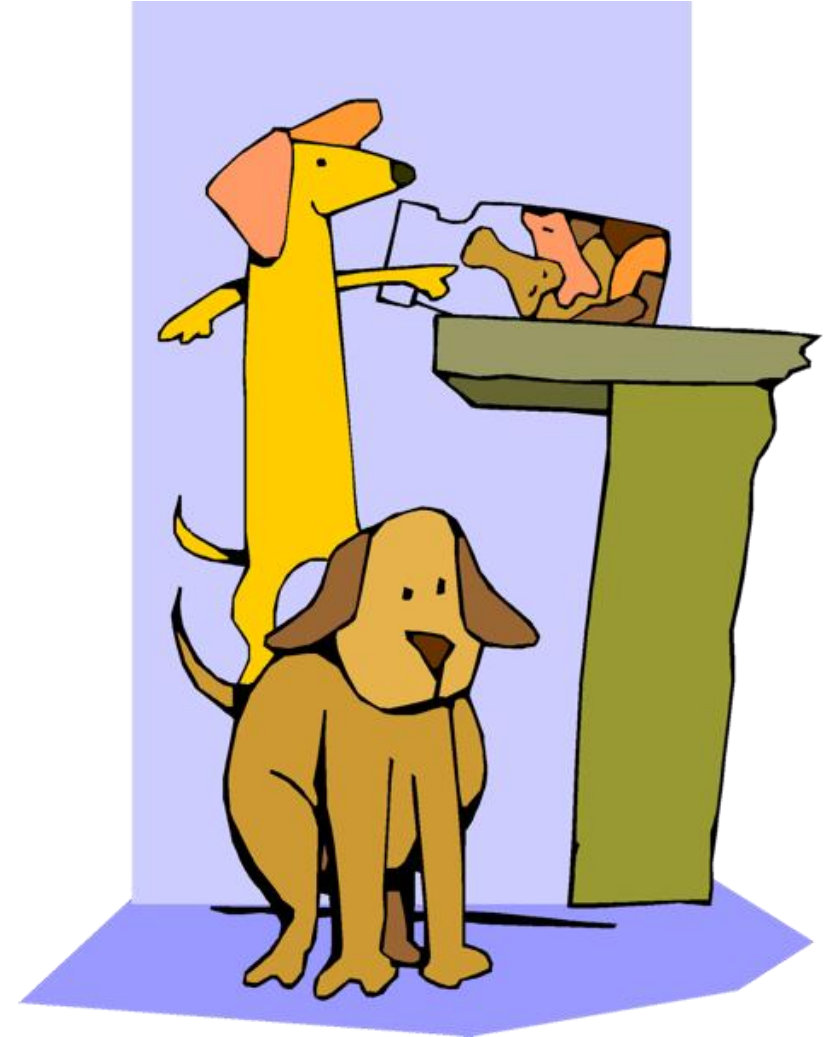
Doing Homework

- Facilitators must take the time to understand the problem to be addressed, the key players involved in it, and the ‘big issues’ around the objectives
- But they should resist the temptation of developing their own conclusions prior to the game
 - If they come across as biased they may lose the trust of the players
 - Nevertheless, they should have some idea of what they expect to happen



Articulating The Problem

- The key to good facilitation is a clear, concise articulation of the issue and ensuring that all participants understand the objective



Asking, Not Telling

- Facilitators must never get on their soapbox and demonstrate their vast knowledge
- Good Facilitators use their skills to help others get to a common, agreed-upon resolution to problems
- The best Facilitators do so by asking pointed, specific questions which are relevant to the problem statement and designed to bring new facts to light
- Once the Facilitator starts pontificating then the event stops being about the *players* solving the problem
 - And therefore completely misses the point



Encouraging Inclusion

- Facilitators should take particular note of those who aren't speaking up during game events
 - *But they should note cultural differences if applicable*
 - They should look for opportune moments to ask them specific questions about what they think about the particular issues being addressed

“Read the room”

Graham Longley-Brown, *Successful Professional Wargames*

- But for the purposes of game tempo, they should encourage ‘silence procedures’ where appropriate
- While encouraging inclusion is important, they should be cautious not to ‘pick on’ any attendees or to create an environment of discomfort

Sticking To The Knitting

- Facilitators must keep things moving toward addressing the game objectives
- Frequently, they'll find that play will drift off course and will not be contributing towards solving the immediate problem
- The job of the Facilitator is to keep the game moving forward while at the same time not being so rigid that the participants get frustrated
- If the players have begun to address a different topic, or if discussions have become destructive, they must bring things back on course



Lack of education



Poverty



Climate Change



Public Health



Homelessness



Water and Food Security



Unemployment



High Morbidity



Pollution

Causes of conflict

Capturing Key Items

- Frequently during games specific actions relative to solving the problem will be revealed (i.e. you just might find an answer...)
- Facilitators must be diligent about ensuring those key items are captured and made available to the players
- They should take the time to summarize matters at appropriate points, to ensure everyone agrees as to the meaning and importance of what has been found



Parking

- Many times a facilitated session will uncover other important issues which should be captured but are not necessarily relevant to the immediate objective(s)
- Those items should be placed in a 'parking lot' to be addressed in future play
- Facilitators should refer back to it as necessary, in order to keep the game focused



Being In Control

- The Facilitators need to continuously ensure that all voices can be heard, and that contributions are appropriate and relevant
- This may mean wrestling control of the discussion from an outspoken player or shifting the debate back to the objective
- It isn't always pleasant and could be likely to upset someone, but that's their job
 - *Believe me, I've been there...*
- Lose control of the situation and they lose the respect of the participants



Not Getting Hijacked

- Facilitators should keep individuals (especially senior ones) from hijacking the debate
- Very often, the highest-ranking person present expresses his or her opinion and subsequently sets the course of the discussion to his or her agenda
- Once 'the boss' states a perspective then it can be harder for others to challenge it or to speak up



Staying Objective

- It is essential that Facilitators are perceived as completely objective and are not viewed as being in anyone's 'camp' during a game
- If a Facilitator is viewed as leaning in a particular direction, then the trust of the attendees may quickly be lost
 - Particularly those who may be on the opposing side of the debate
- Once trust is lost, it's difficult to regain, so Facilitators must stay balanced at all times



Not Fretting (too much)

- Facilitators shouldn't worry if they feel they're not saying or doing anything
 - As long as the players are saying and doing things!
 - Everything may be running perfectly, and that's actually the Facilitator's Nirvana
- When in dynamic play, their principal job is Repair Person
- However, they should be prepared to step in to steer things
 - But only if the players can't self-organize, which is always the preferred option

Top Tips

Do	Don't
Listen more	Talk too much
Observe more	Ask leading questions
Know your audience	Trample on cultures
Be very patient	Interrupt
Know where to intervene	Leap in unnecessarily
Encourage all to contribute	Pick on favourites / usual suspects
Use simple language	Use jargon, acronyms or slang
Be at the level of your audience	Disrespect your audience
Respect other people's opinions	Give your own view
Look out for dominant voices	Become the focus of group attention
Be flexible	Rigidly drive them back on track all the time
Be imaginative and creative	Have your own prior agenda
Make the group feel at ease	Try to impress them with your brilliance

Despite All That



You'll still need to be prepared to make it
up as you go along

So How Do You Get There?

1. Start with, or develop, the right skill set
2. If possible, get some formal or informal training
3. Work with an experienced facilitator
 - i. Under their guidance
 - ii. Alongside them
 - iii. Supported by them
 - iv. As part of a wider team
4. Rehearse and practice

Practice makes better, but never perfect



And a sense of humour helps...



Questions?

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