1 Six Steps

A process may be a single workshop that happens over a few hours or a longer initiative that includes a series of meetings, strategic sessions, consultations, and reports that take place over eighteen months or more. This book focuses on how to design a major process—a workshop, forum, consultation, retreat, conference, think tank, summit, or the like—within a large multiphase initiative.

A stepwise approach to process design recognizes six fundamental steps required to do this work well (Figure 1.1).

Although these six steps are distinct and provide an overall pattern, they are not always taken in this sequence: they interact, overlap, and may seem to converge when an important issue is being discussed. While some steps are more comprehensive

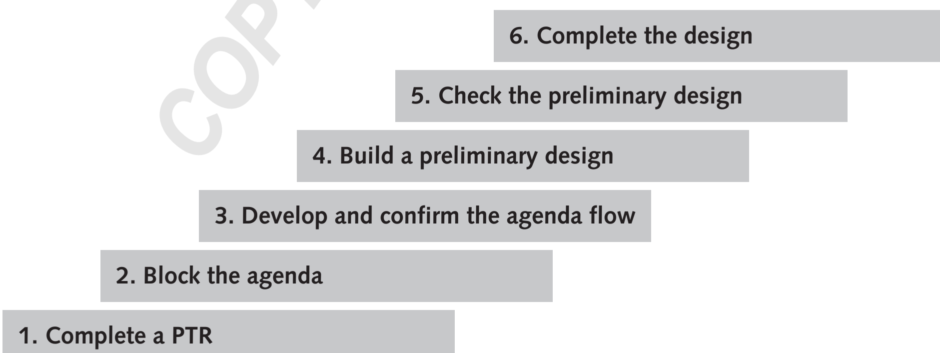


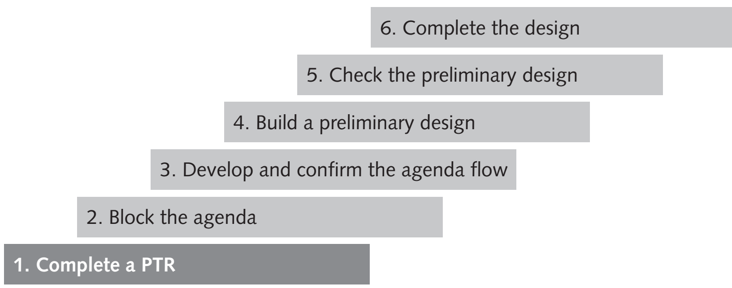
Figure 1.1. A Stepwise Approach

and time-consuming than others, each is an essential and important part of developing a design.

Process designs can be *pre-structured* (thought through ahead of time), *emergent* (thought through on the spot), or some *combination of the two*. Expect the unexpected: it's common to have developed a design for part of a process and then to revise it in response to the demands of the situation.

The more information facilitators have about the situations they face, the better prepared they are to anticipate and address what may happen unpredictably in the resulting processes.

STEP 1. COMPLETE A PROCESS TERMS OF REFERENCE



A process terms of reference (PTR) is a conceptual framework for understanding eight key elements that affect how a design rolls out in the hands of a facilitator. These eight elements describe the situation, purpose and objectives, stakeholders, core assumptions, key considerations, work plan, governance, and documentation for an initiative (Figure 1.2).

Completing a PTR with stakeholders enables a disciplined approach to understanding a situation. It is an excellent way to build ownership among stakeholders for an initiative and encourage long-term engagement to support the achievement of outcomes. A PTR goes through several iterations as people work together, thinking, discussing, and writing their way toward clarity.

Developing a PTR also helps address the hindsight "if only" factor that has a tendency to crop up when you are facilitating: *if only* I had included a comprehensive fact sheet on this issue; *if only* we had invited that group of stakeholders; *if only* I had more sector-specific examples to support this discussion; *if only* I had allotted this group task more time; *if only* I had scheduled the keynote speaker on the second morning instead of the first evening when people needed more time to get to know one another better; *if only* I had chosen a different decision-making model to accommodate this group's participation style; *if only* . . .

A PTR can prevent if-only moments like these by clearly articulating the terms and conditions that guide people's interactions and decision making throughout a facilitated event.

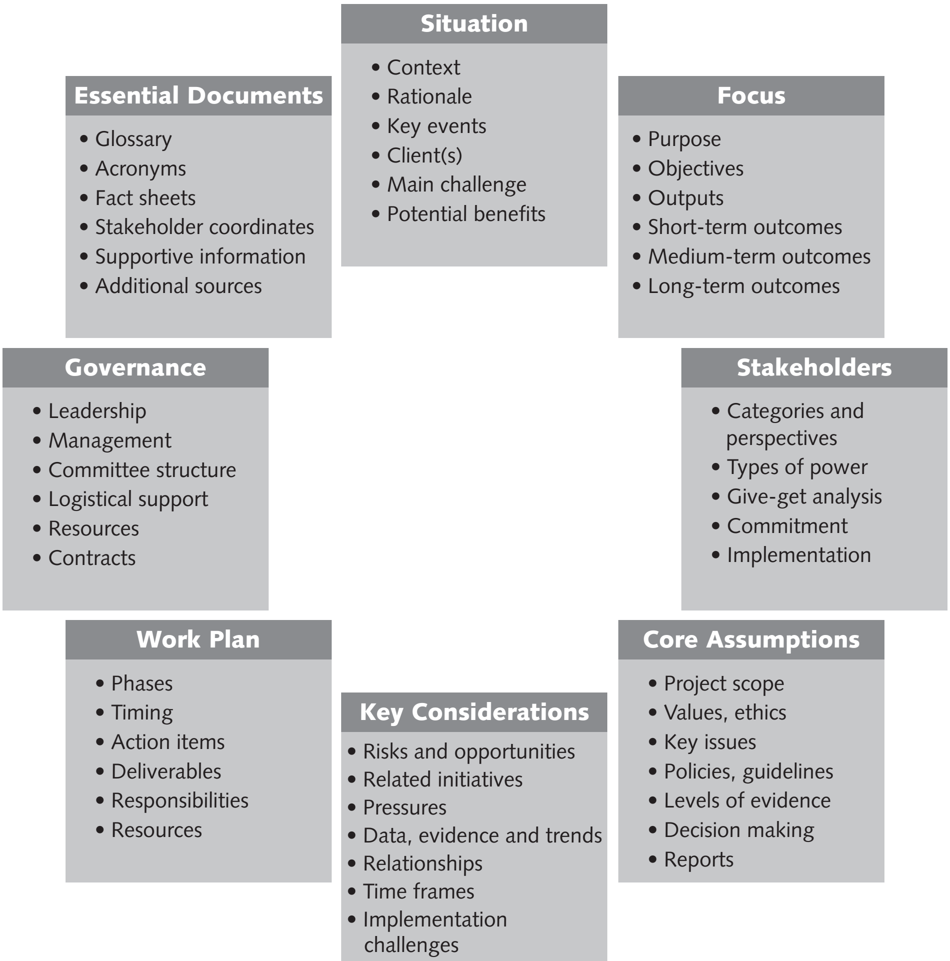
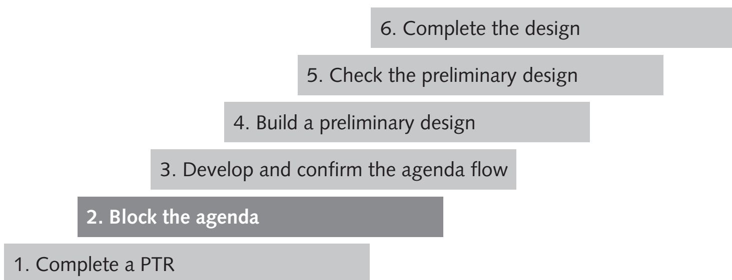


Figure 1.2. PTR at a Glance

Processes rarely occur individually: they happen in clusters, existing inside, around, and in relation to other processes in various ways. Even when a process intervention looks like a single workshop, it is actually several processes, each with a life of its own: the committee responsible for planning the workshop has its own process; the group responsible for developing and reviewing the background documents for the workshop has its own process; the implementation group has another process when considering how to act on the workshop conclusions. When designing a workshop or meeting within a larger process, the designer needs to keep in mind how the workshop fits into and supports the larger initiative. Completing a PTR helps to ensure that stakeholders have this comprehensive view of a situation.

See Part Three for a detailed guide to developing a PTR.

STEP 2. BLOCK THE AGENDA



An *agenda* is a basic, timed outline for what will happen in a session or workshop process. A *design* is a detailed description of how a session or workshop process will be facilitated.

Using the PTR as a starting point, confirm the basic schedule for the agenda such as starting and finishing times, required opening and closing remarks, meals and breaks, recreation opportunities, and planning committee meetings. Find out if this client group prefers certain timing based on people's participation styles. For example, do they like to have shorter lunches and finish earlier or longer lunches and stay later?

Identify logistical factors that will have an impact on success—people leaving early or coming late, for example, or probable weather challenges. Adjust the basic agenda to accommodate these factors. Be realistic: if people are only going to stay until 3:00 P.M., then don't expect to have an important decision process on the agenda at 3:00 with a finish time scheduled for 4:30.

Although in an ideal situation the process consultant starts from scratch to determine a basic agenda in collaboration with a client or planning committee, what often happens—even before developing a PTR—is that some decisions have already been made such as time available, confirmed speakers, key outputs. If this is the case, be prepared to negotiate the amount of time available for the workshop, keeping in mind the purpose and objectives.

Number the main blocks of working time. One block is usually about an hour and a half to two hours and is framed by breaks and meals. Does the total number of main blocks provide enough time to get the work done?

Be realistic about break times. Most participants have electronic devices with them and will want to check in with their workplace regularly. Given this fact, if you want to have these devices off during a workshop, schedule breaks at least twenty minutes long to enable people to relax a little and also to check their messages.

Identify the best time blocks for optimal learning, energy levels, and decision making. Given what you know about how people will be getting to the workshop, where it will be held, how these processes have happened in the past, and group participation styles, label each block in terms of quality time:

- High = prime, high-quality time when engagement is expected to be highest
- Medium = middle-quality time when engagement needs to be consciously supported
- Low = lower-quality time when productive engagement is least likely

When considering what is prime time, think about how you feel during a process: when you are most likely to be fully engaged and when you are likely to be thinking about other things such as whether the shuttle will arrive in time for you to catch your flight or what time you have to leave in order to pick up your children at day care. Figure 1.3 outlines the probable quality of the blocks in a two-day agenda.

Consider requirements for "fermentation" or "soak" time. Will people be processing substantial amounts of information that can't be integrated in a short time?

	Tuesday	Wednesday
8:00	Light Breakfast	Light Breakfast
8:30	**Block 1** High	**Block 5** Medium
10:30	Break	Break
11:00	**Block 2** High	**Block 6** High
12:30	Lunch	Lunch
13:30	**Block 3** Low	**Block 7** Medium—Low
15:00	Break	Closing
15:30	**Block 4** Medium	
17:00	Free Time for Participants	
	Planning for Committee Meeting	
19:00	Group Dinner	

Figure 1.3. A Blocked Agenda for a Two-Day Workshop

Identify related initiatives and considerations that may affect participants and therefore how you block the agenda. For example, will people need to start a little later on the first morning because the session you are planning is following another related intense meeting that will be finishing late the evening before?

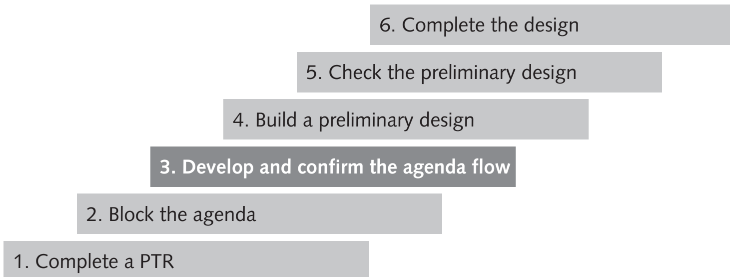
Encourage your client and key stakeholders to get used to talking

> We find the blocks of time after lunch to be the most challenging. People are usually full of food and feeling relaxed, and they need to be engaged at a deep level to get the most out of that time period. Small group work (particularly with groups of three or four people where everyone is involved) supports engagement here.

about blocks of working time. This helps them be realistic about exactly how much time there is for productive work over a designated period. A two-day workshop rarely has more than seven blocks of working time when you take into consideration meals, breaks, and time for recreation and informal networking.

You can create a blocked agenda in ten minutes with your client or planning committee. Avoid getting into a long discussion about this basic outline: it's tempting to get sidetracked into the details of the design when what you need to focus on first is an agenda outline.

STEP 3. DEVELOP AND CONFIRM HOW THE AGENDA WILL FLOW



The agenda flow outlines the logic for how a process will proceed. It is based primarily on the purpose and objectives as outlined in the PTR.

Dynamic designs are similar to dynamic fitness sessions. Both have three main phases: warmup, workout, and cooldown. Assign the most difficult parts of the process to times when the group is warmed up, and the participants are fairly comfortable with one another and are performing well.

Position other items throughout the agenda based on the nature of activities, choosing time slots according to your priorities: for example, holding interactive group discussions after lunch to support participant engagement. Avoid scheduling key decision-making sessions and turning points at times when participants are likely to be distracted, hungry, or tired.

Include key points about the *warmup* (purpose, outcomes, introductions, norms for working together), the *workout* (where the main objectives will be addressed), and the *cooldown* (concluding remarks, next steps, feedback, debriefing) aspects of the flow.

Keep the agenda flow as simple as possible: avoid getting into specific details of the design. Blocking the agenda and describing the flow is about the *what.* The detailed design is about the *how.*

Using Metaphors

Interesting metaphors can make a design come alive. Use the flow of your design to suggest a metaphor that helps people identify with where a process is going and how they can contribute to making it work. A metaphor can also become a creative theme for a day. Some examples:

- "We're a bunch of big heavy whales that are slow to turn. We need to become fast-moving sharks if we want to survive in this industry."
- "We're at the beginning of this process—and based on our background documents, we're pretty much in the ocean here. What we need to do is work together and get into the channel: this is where we want to be this afternoon."
- "Let's think about ourselves as too good and not so good. How are we too good? In what ways are we not so good?"
- "We're hummingbirds now and that's a big part of our success. We're good at hovering over sweet sales and then diving in to get the nectar before our competitors even know it's there."

Encourage participants to make up their own metaphors based on their experience of the challenge they are discussing. Here are two examples of agenda flow, with the metaphor driving the flow:

Flow: yesterday—today—tomorrow (a chronological metaphor)

- Part One: *Yesterday* worldwide—progress to date
- Part Two: *Today* in our country—the current situation
- Part Three: *Tomorrow* across the country—an innovative, integrated system

Flow: information—implications—applications (an input-output metaphor)

- Part One: Provide *information* about what works and doesn't work for joint initiatives.

- Part Two: Explore *implications* of the information in Part One in terms of the purpose and objectives.
- Part Three: Determine *applications* for future joint initiatives.

Creating a visual metaphor to describe the flow gives you a simple and direct way to explain how the agenda will move throughout the workshop. Use it to share ideas with your client and planning committee members, to check that everyone has the same understanding of the process, and to explain the overall approach to participants. Here are some additional common visual metaphors for workshop designs:

- A + B + C = X
- A funnel
- A ladder
- A series of concentric circles
- A star constellation
- A storm leading to a sunny day
- Avoiding bad to worse
- Building blocks for a foundation
- Components leading to an assembled entity
- Confused arrows going in several directions leading to parallel arrows going in a single direction
- Future—past—present; or past—present—future
- Form follows function
- General to specific
- Getting our ducks in a row
- Identify issues—set criteria—choose priorities—set action plan
- Sailing from familiar shores across an unknown sea to distant shores
- Means and ends
- Multiple parts to a single whole

- Outside to inside
- Step-by-step
- Synergy: 1 + 1 + 1 = 111
- Theory into practice
- Venn diagram
- What do you think—what do we think—future thinking
- What works—what doesn't—where to go from here
- Whole-part-whole

Clients and stakeholders often have mental images for a process that remain unconscious until a discussion brings them to the surface. Encourage a creative approach to developing an appropriate visual metaphor. This discussion can also be a useful way to surface inferences about the design: check these out with participants as a way of validating the PTR. Figures 1.4 through 1.13 provide examples of some useful visual metaphors.

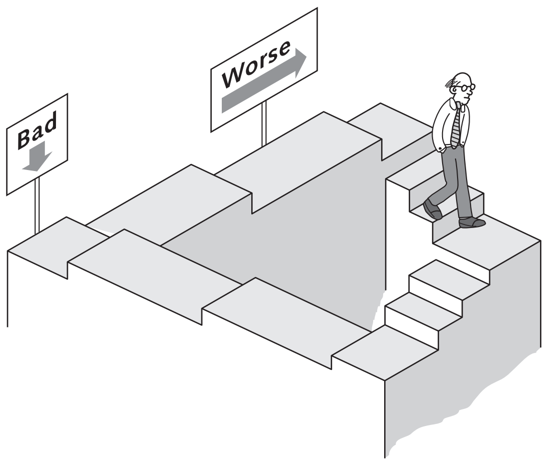


Figure 1.4. Avoiding Bad to Worse

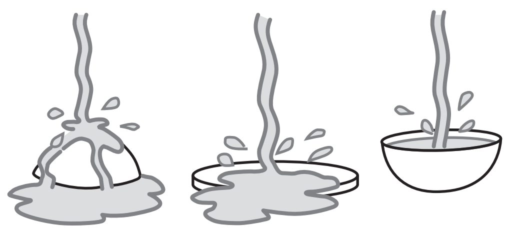


Figure 1.5. Bowl Function

If you can't draw the flow and relate it to a metaphor, chances are that: you haven't yet consolidated what the design is about; people are not clear about how the PTR is driving the design; and people are not yet in agreement about what needs to happen to achieve the designated outputs and outcomes.

Maintain a collaborative approach with your client and

Figure 1.6. Broken Circle

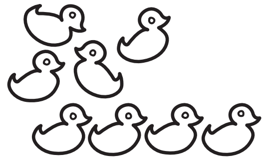


Figure 1.7. Ducks in a Row

Figure 1.8. Funnel

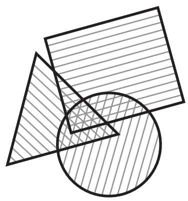


Figure 1.9. Geometric

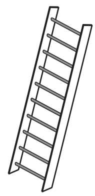


Figure 1.10. Ladder

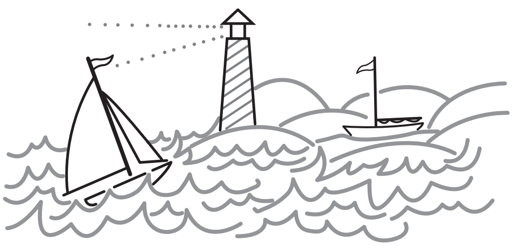


Figure 1.11. Sea

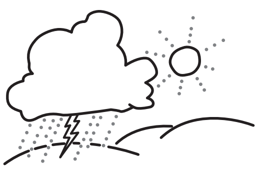


Figure 1.12. Sun and Showers

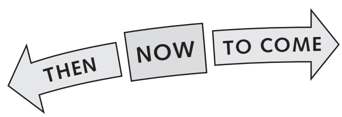


Figure 1.13. Then and Now

planning committee while outlining a flow like the one illustrated in Figure 1.14: this builds ownership for how people participate in the process and follow through on outcomes.

Sometimes clients will have an idea about how to design a session but little training and experience in design. Listen carefully and respect their input, maintaining a collaborative stance while commenting on the risks and benefits of var-

	Thursday, Oct. 2	Friday, Oct. 3	Saturday, Oct. 4
7:30		Breakfast	Breakfast
8:00		Part II Continued	Part IV Continued
10:00		Break	Break
10:30		**Part III: Description of Research Themes**	**Part V: Implementing the Research Agenda**
11:30			
			Lunch
12:30		Lunch	Part V Continued
13:30		Part III Continued	Concluding Remarks, Feedback
14:00			Closing
			Debriefing Meeting
15:00		Break	
15:30		**Part IV: Identification of Research Questions**	
16:30	Reception, Registration,		
	Resource Table		
17:30	Welcome, Opening Remarks	Closing	
	Dinner	Free Evening	
18:30	**Part I: Process Overview**		
20:00	**Part II: The Current Situation**		
21:00	Closing		

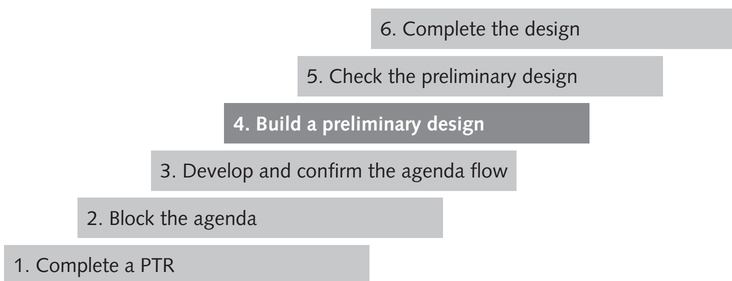
Figure 1.14. Agenda Flow: Setting Research Priorities

ious approaches. At the same time, be transparent about your commitment to protecting your ultimate role, responsibility, and accountability for the process design.

For example, in one situation a client proudly told us that he had already done a basic agenda for an issues-based team development process. He had allotted four blocks of time over a two-day period for presentations and discussions on key concepts in team development and three blocks for identifying and discussing issues that team members needed to address.

It was clear that he was quite nervous about getting into difficult conversations and dealing with the potential for people's blaming one another for current problems. By the time we had completed a PTR and revisited the agenda, we had agreed that issues would be identified ahead of time through interviews with team members, and the entire two-day process would be focused on discussing and resolving those issues—with no presentations at all.

STEP 4. BUILD A PRELIMINARY DESIGN



Process frameworks guide the development and flow of process designs. A process framework is a step-by-step conceptual guide to what a facilitator does in a structured group experience. It is like a map organized around facilitation challenges. It makes the process explicit, furnishes a reference point for keeping a process on track, and supports facilitators in thinking about design questions consciously, whether for a single workshop on strategic planning or a long-term, multi-session team development initiative.

Although all processes have their own unique history, situation, objectives, and complicating factors, they also share typical facilitation challenges. Figure 1.15 outlines five process frameworks for five common facilitation challenges. The specific

1

Opening a Session	Enabling Action	Thinking Critically	Addressing Issues	Closing a Session
1. Getting to know one another 2. Clarifying expectations 3. Building commitment	1. What? (Observation) 2. So what? (Reflection) 3. Now what? (Action)	1. Making assumptions and perspectives explicit 2. Understanding interests and power relationships 3. Exploring alternative ways of thinking and acting 4. Making critical choices	1. Understanding the situation 2. Clarifying the issues 3. Generating options for action 4. Testing options for action 5. Making a decision 6. Taking action	1. Looking backward: wrapping up the process 2. Looking forward: considering the next steps

Figure 1.15. Five Process Frameworks
Strachan, 2007, p. 5.

questions that drive each section of the process framework are outlined in a detailed design.

Every session has a process framework for opening and one for closing. A main process framework such as "addressing issues" forms the basis of a design; sometimes other process frameworks are included as well. To use process frameworks to design a session, think strategically:

- *For the warmup:* Review the process framework for opening a session and decide where you want to put your emphasis in this design. Keep the PTR in mind as you decide on questions and activities.
- *For the workout:* Decide which process frameworks (or combinations of frameworks) you want to use in the main part of the design. For example, you may want to start a strategic planning workshop with people spending some time on questions for critical reflection before moving into the enabling action framework (what—so what—now what).
- *For the cooldown:* Do you want to focus on celebrating success or building ownership for follow-through—or both?

Each preliminary design is customized to fit the unique demands of the PTR its stakeholders have developed. As a result, several models for facilitation are usually integrated in each design. Here is an example of how this might work for a two-day team development workshop:

- *Opening Process Framework:* Open Space model with questions emphasizing expectations and commitment
- *Process Framework for Addressing Issues:* Appreciative Inquiry model for understanding the situation; force field analysis tool to clarify the issues through identification of driving and restraining factors; consensus-building approach to generating and testing options for action; priority-ranking approach to making a decision and taking action
- *Closing Process Framework:* Questions for looking back on the session in terms of learning and productivity and looking forward in terms of the next team development session

Checklist: Reviewing a Preliminary Design

The purpose of this checklist is to stimulate additional reflections once you have the preliminary draft of your design in hand.

1. How does the design accommodate the following elements in the PTR? (See Figure 1.2.)

- *Situation:* Who will outline the rationale for the process and anticipated benefits at the front end of the workshop? What types of power does this person bring to the process to support its credibility and potential impact?
- *Focus:* Check to make sure that your client is comfortable with the time and degree of emphasis on each objective. Think about time blocks in relation to the priority of your objectives. Assign a number to each objective and place it next to the agenda block that focuses on that objective. For example, put #2 to represent objective #2 next to each block in the agenda that addresses that objective. Summarize what this says about the design in a discussion with your client.

Checklist: Reviewing a Preliminary Design, Cont'd.

Talk about your objectives in terms of percentage of time allotment. Indicate what percentage of your agenda is devoted to each objective. Is this percentage appropriate given its nature, priority, and the pre-work and supportive documentation prepared to support this objective? Is this percentage appropriate when compared to the time allotted to other objectives?

- *Stakeholders:* Review the participant list to ensure that you have a range of perspectives in the room to support an inclusive approach.

How does the design support the group's participation style?

How does participant seating work to support this design?

When should people be seated in homogenous groups? Why?

When should people be seated in heterogeneous groups? Why?

When should you use criteria to organize seating to encourage a maximum mix of perspectives in discussions?

Should people stay in the same groups throughout the entire process? Why? Why not?

- *Core assumptions:* What are the top two assumptions anchoring the process that need to be emphasized at the front end of this design?
- *Key considerations:* What issues will generate the most energy (flash points and fermentation points) in this process? Why?
- *Governance:* Where in the design are those accountable for the success of this initiative given time to support intended outputs and outcomes?
- *Essential documents:* Is anyone likely to be disadvantaged during discussions as a result of not having the same baseline information as others in the group?

2. How does the design accommodate a range of learning and participation styles? What percentage of the design will be focused on:

- Listening to speakers
- Hands-on interactive activities such as case studies and problem solving

Checklist: Reviewing a Preliminary Design, Cont'd.

- Small group discussions
- Plenary discussion
- Reflection
- Decision making

Are these percentages appropriate given your objectives and expected outputs and outcomes? Is there enough variety to encourage continuous participation for all involved?

3. What can participants learn that is of value to them and their organizations and is additional to the process objectives?

4. What values anchor how decision making will happen throughout the process? How is this reflected in the design?

5. Every process has a transition point where the focus of participants moves from objectives to outcomes: how does your design enable this transition? What can you say to support this change in focus?

This transition time is a turning point for the design. It often happens after a "storming" phase (Tuckman, 1965) when people have sorted out how the process will evolve and have accepted the need to work together as well as the suggested design and the approach to facilitation. You can trigger it by asking people how the current discussion relates to anticipated outcomes or by commenting on what you notice; for example, "Now that we have confirmed these criteria, we can start to move into the meat of the issues."

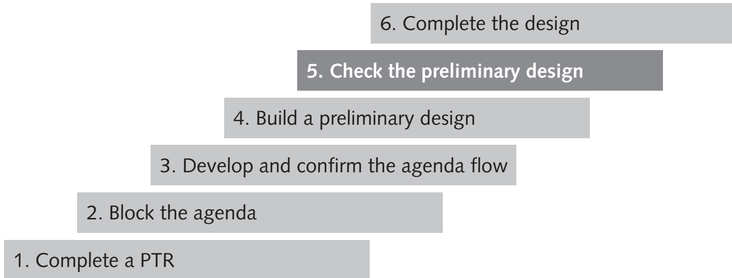
This is the point when the facilitator may think, "OK, now we're really starting to move on this agenda. This feels good."

6. What words would you use to describe the pace of this design? Do these words reflect the PTR?

7. What makes this particular process unique? How is this uniqueness reflected in the design?

8. What needs to happen to make this process exceptional?

STEP 5. CHECK THE PRELIMINARY DESIGN WITH OTHERS



Share the draft design with your client and key planning committee members. Ask them to review it and provide feedback. Provide specific questions for their consideration:

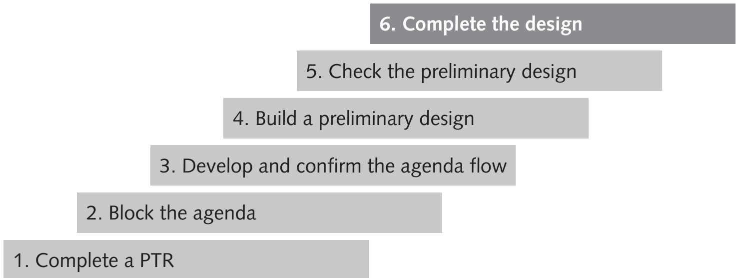
- Does the flow make sense based on your understanding of the challenge?
- Are the time allocations appropriate? (Note topics that you think should get more time or less time.)
- Which parts look most interesting to you? Least interesting? Most challenging?
- If you were facilitating this design, what would you see as the low-risk sections? What would you see as the high-risk sections?

Keep the design review group small. For most people involved with a process, this is simply too much information. It's like sharing the smallest technical details of a building plan with people who aren't architects.

Consider sharing your ideas and concerns with another process consultant. Sharing experiences in learning partnerships is a great way to prevent unnecessary interventions and take a design up a notch in terms of excellence.

> Designs rarely permit easy answers to difficult questions, so why do we expect that? And why do we yearn for it even though complexity is the source of our work?

STEP 6. COMPLETE THE DESIGN



This final step is often time-consuming, as it requires considerable attention to detail:

- Insert activities and methods.
- Outline key points for speakers.
- Include reminders about facilitation such as "Take a strategic perspective here, not an operational one," or "Ensure that everyone contributes ideas during this brainstorming session."
- Identify specific questions for group discussions.
- Be specific about timing; for example, remind people to be back from lunch on time.
- Insert seating instructions such as this one: "People return after lunch to the second table number on the back of their name tags."

PROPOSITIONS

1. Processes are dynamic, evolving, and often predictable entities.
2. Process design is intuitive, rational, artistic, scientific, and all of these together.
3. Process design evolves the gray areas of an issue into black-and-white conclusions.
4. When it comes to design, *simple* doesn't mean *easy.*