

WARGAME FACILITATION

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“Control's role is to make the whole experience feel as open ended and real-world as possible and allow players to have the opportunity to make mistakes as well as experience stunning successes.

An important point about the value of playing serious games is that they create a safe to fail environment”.

What Skills/Experience Do I Need?

Anyone who has experience of facilitation has what is needed already.

Key skills include:

- Being a good 'active listener' - especially listening to what people are actually saying
- A degree of self-awareness - the ability to manage yourself.
- Able to ask good open questions that guide players without directing them
- Ability to focus on the aims and purpose of the game (as distinct from being distracted by what might seem like a fun digression or cool inject).
- Time management skills.
- Good social skills, especially around emotional literacy and empathy, and ideally including a sense of humour.

Advice & Assistance

Advice *includes*

- Game Structure
- Options (in context) for the inexperienced
- 'NPC Advice'
- Exploring the problem(s)

Advice **does not include**

- Making player decisions for them (The TINA Effect)
- Solving gameplay-related problems
- Becoming a player

Inclusion

Facilitation has inclusion at its core.

- Every voice must be heard
- Diverse thinking is identified and captured
- Good manners matter...

Manners Maketh the Game

Watch out for unacceptable behaviours - some common examples include

- Talking over someone
- Personal Comments, especially belittling / patronising ones
- Dismissal
- Twaddling
- Needless authority
- Mansplaining

These must always be addressed and standards clearly set (ideally at the outset)

Hosting

Reading the room for participation.

- Uninvolved players
- Distracted players
- Player conflicts
- Triggering or distress

Self-Care

To be an effective facilitator means paying attention to self-care.

- Get enough sleep the night before. This is important.
- Eat healthy food.
- Hot drinks are better than cold drinks
- Avoid alcohol (at least until afterwards).
- Take a time out if you need to. Even 5 minutes.
- Speak to other members of the Control Team if there is something (or someone) bothering you. Never try to handle personally challenging situations alone.

Troubleshooting

In addition to the basic task of managing the game, other things crop up:

- Players have not read their game materials and want you to tell them how the game works in real time on the day as they are playing
- A player is feeling out of their depth
- The player's game role is not holding their attention.
- A player is having a bad day/year/life in general.
- Players who do 'decision shopping'
- Interpersonal problems
- Player-to-player personal conflicts
- Player-to-Control conflicts.
- Unpopular game results.
- Pedantic rule-mongers & optimisers

Further Reading

Defence Concepts & Doctrine Centre (2021). **Red Teaming Handbook (3rd Edition)**. UK Ministry of Defence.

Defence Concepts & Doctrine Centre (2017). **Wargaming Handbook (3rd Edition)**. UK Ministry of Defence.

Kofman, F. (2014). **Conscious Business: How to build value through value**. Sounds True Ltd: Boulder, CO. Despite the title, this book is entirely about effective communication skills and the contents are highly transferable to game facilitation. Available in paperback or audiobook.

Thank You For Listening!

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THE EXERCISE

SPLIT INTO GROUPS – Each group will be given a couple of real-world facilitation challenges.

Discuss among yourselves how these might approach.

Select a spokesperson and we'll come back into the Voice channel for a short brief-back on you conversation.

Focus Points

- Note how are you facilitating each other in this breakout group?
- What might be helpful actions for the facilitator to take
- What might be especially unhelpful actions a facilitator might take

THE EXERCISE : WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

GROUP 1

You are organising a large multiple-team, multiplayer geopolitical wargame and halfway through you notice two of the female players heading for the door with their coats and bags, looking like they are leaving.

GROUP 2

In a room of 20 players engaged in a open face to face map wargame, you happen to notice one player at the back of the room reading a newspaper.

GROUP 3

Several members of your control team tell you that a player has been asking them same same question about the game process, but apparently unhappy with the answer.

GROUP 4

You notice two of your players arguing with raised voices in one corner of the room.

GROUP 5

A player comes to you and says "I don't understand what I'm supposed to do or anything about wargames - why am I even here?"

GROUP 6

A player comes to you and says "I'm much more experienced at designing and running wargames than you and I don't understand why you have designed the game this way. Explain why the game is like this because it makes no sense to me."

GROUP 7

A player is a senior person in the organisation's hierarchy and they have decided they do not like the outcome of one fo the games moves and is insisting that you change the result, "...because I'm the boss..".