Workshop Requirements (Venues and Materials)

This piece outlines some of the workshop requirements you may want to consider. These are basically ideal requirements that you can use as a guide when looking for a venue, or briefing a venue. That said, you will need to adjust this to your specific requirements, and in every workshop, we have to work with what is there in the context. If you find that you end up in a place that does not meet the ideal requirements, the best strategy is to find out what does work in this venue, what kinds of metaphors it inspires etc. For example, in a recent learning journey we were in a terrible, long, narrow room, and the facilitator, rather than being upset about the situation, said, “it feels like we are in a boat – what should we call the boat?”

When looking for a venue and setting up workshop requirements, our objective is to create an environment that helps people shift out of their usual harried and reactive mode into a more relaxed and reflective one. The workshop environment is critical to meeting this objective and enabling them to broaden their perspectives through an open and innovative process. The atmosphere in the room therefore must be informal and non-business; it should ideally feel like being a comfortable living room, with chairs, music, flowers, and house plants. In a typical conference center this takes some ingenuity and persistence.

The ideal venue is a small, unpretentious hotel (which we can take over completely), located away from the city, in an inspiring natural setting. The distance to the city needs to be weighed up against learning journey requirements for the specific course or mini-lab.

N.B. Confirm with the venue that no other events have been scheduled nearby that will disrupt our workshop, e.g. wedding, disco, construction, fire alarm test.

Ideal facility requirements

- One large airy room, flat floor, with lots of wall space to hang flip charts (guidelines as to size: 5 participants, 500 square feet; 50 participants, 2500 square feet; 200 participants, 5000 square feet). Windows and natural light. One half of the room will be used for plenary sessions (no tables) and the other half for small group work (small round tables). No break-out rooms needed.

- An assortment of comfortable chairs: sofas, armchairs, patio furniture, bar stools, executive chairs, straight chairs, etc. (these chairs do not have to be all of the same type). The straight-backed conference chairs usually provided by hotels are too uncomfortable (we can use some of these but not only these).

- Small tables (cocktail rounds, not large dinner tables), one fitting four participants. A few high (bar) tables. Straight-backed chairs are fine around these small tables.

- A small table for materials at the front of the room. A table for the secretary (if applicable). A long table at side of room on which participants can place their coats, briefcases, etc.

- Some floor lamps with traditional down lighting shades.

- Large wastepaper basket.

- Some plants and flowers.

- Projector and screen.

- CD music player.
o No ashtrays or phones in the room.

**Food and drink**

o All breaks (coffees, lunches, dinners) should be taken outside of the room.

o Tea, coffee, water, soft drinks, etc. should be available in the room throughout the day.

o Times for breaks and meals will be advised in advance but need to be slightly flexible so as not to break the work at an inconvenient time.

o Lunches should be light (buffet is good).

o Dinners in a private dining room (including if off-site).

**Secretarial support (when applicable)**

o Staff to transcribe selected flip charts onto A4/8½ X11 paper and to make photocopies of all material produced, so that the participants can take it away with them at the end of the workshop.

o Computer with word processing package.

o Laser printer.

o Easily-accessible, high-volume photocopier.

**Materials for workshop (adjust to specific requirements)**

o Flip chart easels (1 easel per 6 participants) with flip chart paper, plus extra pads of flip chart paper

o Rolls of masking tape to tape flipchart paper to the walls (1 wide roll [2”], plus 1 narrow roll [3/4”) per 6 participants)

o Flip chart pens (broad tip, non bleed, dark colors only, 1 per participant, e.g. Sanford or Mr. Sketch—not whiteboard pens)

o Pads of 100 Post-Its (75mm x 130mm, 1 pad per 6 participants)

o CDs with workshop music

o Journal/notebooks to write in (hard backed or school-type—not simply a notepad) and pens (1 per participant)

o Butcher paper (1 large roll)

o T-pins, clothes pegs, string

o Name tags for all participants (42 point size minimum, first and last names only)

o Pack of small sticky colored paper dots (at least two colors, 10 dots per participant)

o Polaroid camera and film, or digital camera plus printer
o Material to make collages: assorted old magazines, glue sticks, scissors, crayons, colored paper, etc.

o Large (8.5”) self-adhesive paper hexagons (200 yellow, 200 blue), available from www.vis-it.com

**Outdoor solo (when applicable)**

- Whistle
- Toilet paper in zip lock bags
- Potty shovel
- Small trash bag
- Sitting pad or chair
- Insect repellent
- A few extra ponchos
- Food needed
- Two liters of water per person
- Light lunch, which participants can eat in the van on the way to the site or upon arrival

*Participants should be asked to bring*

- Baseball cap or similar for the sun
- Rain gear
- Fleece jacket or vest for warmth
- Light hiking boots or sturdy running or walking shoes that have been broken in
- Day pack to carry everything

**Specific wall space needs for graphic recording (when applicable)**

We use large sheets of white paper that are 4 feet wide and cut to 6 or 8 foot lengths. These sheets of paper are mounted on a smooth wall.

When using large charts, the optimum working wall space for a large group situation is 24 feet of flat wall surface, unobstructed by molding, chair rails, switchplates, windows, framed pictures, doorways, etc. The best wall surface is one that is free of texture, i.e., a smooth, painted or wall-papered surface. (Note: We use a special artist’s white tape that does not harm paint or wallpaper, wood-paneled or stuccoed surfaces.) There are very few sites that meet this requirement, so here are options we frequently employ.

16 feet of unencumbered, smooth-surfac ed wall space is the next best thing. 16 feet is also the favored minimal amount of space needed whether it is actual wall space or one of the alternatives below. (Note: We can go to 8 feet of space, but this requires a bit more
coordination between the facilitator and the recorder. As an 8 foot section of paper is filled, it will need to be rolled quickly and moved to another section of the room. The facilitator/presenter and recorder need to stay in tune with each other so that this “paper management” is as least disruptive to group process as possible.

We can work on a variety of surfaces, though smooth is best. The types of wall surface we can work on include fabric wall papers that are not heavily textured; stuccoed walls that are not heavily textured; ballroom dividers that are made out of cushioned fabric or of hard surfaced materials.

When the above is not available, we use the following alternatives in order of preference:  

a) Lightweight room dividers: these are the "old-fashioned" kind that office first used when they began to form cubicles. The dividers are simple 5' X 6' "walls" standing on two flat feet.

Rental companies that outfit conventions and meetings usually have these available.

b) Portable Whiteboards (or chalkboards): these are the kind that roll around and the dimension of the actual board space is usually 5' X 6'.

c) Foam Core Boards: Lightweight foam core boards (4' X 8') can be used in a variety of ways. For example, we can tape them up on walls that are too rough, or we can rest them on several sets of flipchart easels. Mounting them on the wall is more stable and easier to work with. The tape we use to do this does not damage the walls.

Special Note about Moldings and/or Chair Rails: Frequently, hotels have a strip of molding (also know as a chair rail) that runs along the wall at about 3 feet above the floor. Unfortunately, this decorative item is right in the middle of the working surface for a graphic recorder. If the wall space is suitable, other than this molding, we usually have the hotel bring in a set of risers or stages and set them up against the wall, running the length of space (24' or 16') that we need. The riser is usually about 12-18 inches off the ground, lifting the graphic recorder up just enough above the molding to be able to work. As an added benefit, in large group situations, using risers also helps the audience see the output of the graphic recording process much more easily. For this reason, risers are also helpful when using the lightweight room dividers described above.

**Version Control**

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Additional facilitator notes

- Certain concepts are too complex for the first introduction to the U, but make sense to introduce at a later stage, e.g. threefolding, the fractal nature of the U…

- If people are sitting in the same chairs all the time, encourage them to move.

- Say the minimum possible up front for them to do the exercise well, and leave more of the teaching to after the exercises, when they can look at it in the context of what they have just done.

- If you are doing a train the trainer, try to be as explicit as possible about everything you are doing as facilitators.

Lessons about conditions for success

- No part-time participants

- Stay overnight

- A room with space for both a circle and small tables

- Retreat setting (social island)