

Moderating a Discussion

Based on a working paper by Dragan Klaic and Mary Ann de Vlieg

1. Background:

Who (needs to know how to moderate well?)

- Everyone!
- Especially women
- Anyone who is or wants to be in a position of responsibility in their organisation, social or professional community (leader)
- anyone who wants to advance views , engage in a debate on some issues

Why (learn how to moderate well?)

- it is a useful skill
- it gives visibility to your own organisation / work
- it makes the difference between a great and an awful session
- it makes speakers' contributions comprehensible to their audience
- everyone always needs good moderators!
- It is helpful to the sector as a whole, it builds our collective credibility, visibility and strength

What (situations are we talking about?) and Where?

- round-tables
- working groups
- panels,
- seminars,
- consultations
- presentations etc
... at

- conferences,
- public meetings,
- post- or pre- performance talks,
- festivals,
- staff meetings

Formats and Styles

- timed speeches



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- conversations
- case study presentations (with or without audio-visual aids)
- interviews
- presentation (could be dramatic) followed by discussion
- Question and Answer
- 'walk and talk' show
- open space method
- 'upside down' (discussion first, speakers after)
- professional: analysis and tough questions
- debate ('for' and 'against')
- professorial/tutorial (pulling it out of people)

2. What to do:

How to Speak

- Slowly - especially if there is simultaneous translation
- clearly (subject-verb-object)
- enunciate each word
- ensure your speakers do the same (REALLY!)
- ask your speakers if YOU don't understand (no one else will have understood either)
- Train your speakers beforehand (terrorize them!)
- Agree "signs" to slow down, stop etc

Success Factors:

Homework

- THINK and WORK
- Know the topic of the debate/panel .
- Know your audience (what they already know, what they want to hear)
- Know your speakers: (or get to know them)
 - o Find out what they will say
 - o Learn about them enough so that you can provoke them or go more deeply
- Know what YOU want (e.g. few main issues or points)

Three Weeks Preceding

- Have pre-event discussions with your speakers, on line, in person or at least on the phone, preferably during the 3 weeks before the event
- Ask them for their speeches or at least for some notes ahead of time



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- 'rehearse' them: even if this is only talking them through the format or writing out and sending them briefings

The Role of the Moderator

- set the frame in the beginning of the session, knowing or having done all of the above.
- You are in charge: be firm but polite and kind to everyone. Humor is a welcome extra.
- Keep the discussion focused, promise to come back to some issues later and then make sure you really do come back.
- Watch that you as moderator do not talk too much. Make sure no one among the panellist monopolises the microphone.
- Listen , paraphrase and summarise (either after each one, after a certain period or at the end
- Engage the audience in the discussion for short questions and comments.

Timing

- Be strict with timing and let them know you will (terror!) Warn your speakers that their time is about to expire by passing them a card (1 more minute only!)
- Feel free to intervene if they go off the topic or slide into technicalities and unnecessary details.
- The best discussions are in continuum, 60-120 min , without a break. A break can destroy concentration and attention

Logistics

- Make sure the panel is placed rather close to the audience, well lit but in a way that not much direct light goes in the eyes of the panellists.
- Make sure the audience is visible and watch carefully for the reactions.
- If a Power Point is used, make sure that you and the panellists can watch the screen properly.

Finally

- At the end, thank the panellists, the audience, the organizers and the interpreters, and keep the audience seated if there are some housekeeping or technical announcements to be made regarding the follow-up programme.

If the organisers need the written texts of all speeches, make sure you have got agreement with all speakers about deadlines for handing these in



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