

FACILITATING THE VOICE IN DECISIONS TECHNIQUE (VIDT)

The Voice in Decisions Technique (VIDT) is a **process** that allows participants to:

- **Name or identify key decisions**
- **Ask their own questions**
- **Focus their questions on:**
 1. **THE REASONS** for a decision
 2. **THE PROCESS** for making that decision
 3. **THE ROLE** they play in the decision

The VIDT includes many elements of the Question Formulation Technique (QFT) and applies specifically to thinking about decisions. For that reason, this guide may seem very similar to our “Facilitating the Question Formulation Technique” guide. When you want to help people learn to ask better questions, you can use the QFT. When you want to help people learn to ask better questions about KEY DECISIONS that affect them, you can use the VIDT.

This guide helps you, the facilitator, lead an individual participant or group of participants through the process.

The VIDT is designed to be a very simple process. But as simple as it is, you may discover that leading the process, or, as we call it, “*facilitating*” the process, requires some changes in the way you may be used to leading a process or the way you may help people by giving explanations. The process will also feel different for participants, who will be doing a lot of the thinking on their own.

Two roles in this process:

1. **Facilitator:** the person who just provides the process that allows people to FOCUS ON DECISIONS AND ASK THEIR OWN QUESTIONS.
2. **Participant:** the person you are leading through the process. Their role at each stage of the VIDT is to do ALL the thinking work.

How will you know you are facilitating the process well?

- You have one role: to give instructions for each step. **If you are just giving the instructions and not explaining or suggesting ideas or questions, you are facilitating the process correctly.**
- This might be difficult for you and it might be difficult for the participants as well. They may want you to explain what you want them to ask or say. You may want to be helpful by giving examples or commenting on their questions. However, the QFT is designed so that the participants do the thinking for themselves and not depend on you for suggestions or approval. Even if participants struggle at first, they should be doing all the thinking, asking the questions and talking, except for when you are giving instructions.
- The QFT is designed so that **participants** build their own question-asking muscles.

Facilitation Timeframes for Individuals and Groups

When you use the VIDT with one person, you can do it quickly in 15 minutes or less.

- Use the template “Having a Say in Decisions That Affect You”

When you use the VIDT with groups of people, you can go through the whole process in 30-40 minutes.

- You may want to use chart paper so participants can follow the work being done with the questions. Have one person in the group be the “scribe” and write the questions.
- Here are some estimates of the time you will need for each part of the process:
 - Learning about decisions, 7 minutes;
 - Discussing the rules, 2 minutes;
 - Producing questions, 4-5 minutes;
 - Working with closed and open-ended questions, 5 minutes (optional);
 - Focusing questions on decisions, 5 minutes;
 - Sharing the work, 5 minutes (optional);
 - Reflection, 5 minutes

STEPS TO FACILITATE THE VOICE IN DECISIONS TECHNIQUE

1. INTRODUCING THE PROCESS

Welcome the participant or group of participants. Tell them that they will be learning about how to participate in decisions that affect them and that you will be sharing a simple process for asking more and better questions.

2. LEARNING ABOUT DECISIONS

A. Share this simple definition of the term decision.

Tell your participant: *a decision is the choice of **one** option from among **two or more** options.*

The goal is not to have a discussion about decisions but to **provide** a simple definition.

Make sure that the participant understands the concept of options.

B. Provide examples of everyday decisions.

Use a simple daily example that participants can relate to. Say:

You make decisions all the time. One example is the decision about what to wear.

Three options may include: 1. a hoodie/sweatshirt, or 2. a t-shirt, or 3. a button down shirt.

The option you choose from these three is the decision you have made.

For example, if you choose the t-shirt, that is the decision.

C. Introduce and define key elements in decision-making: reason, process, and role.

Introduce and define one key element at a time and apply it to the decision on what to wear. Say:

THE REASON: *the reason is the basis or explanation for a decision. For example, if you chose the t-shirt, the reason might be that it is hot outside.*

THE PROCESS: *the information used to make the decision, the people involved and not involved, the steps along the way towards making the decision. The process for deciding what to wear might be checking the temperature.*

YOUR ROLE: *the part you play anywhere in the process for making the decision. For example, you make the decision, someone else makes the decision and you give your opinion, you give information, you accept or challenge the decision. Your role in deciding what to wear is that you made the decision.*

At the end of this step, participants should understand the differences between reasons, process, and role. Facilitators can prepare other simple daily-life examples to quickly show these differences.

3. ASKING QUESTIONS ABOUT DECISIONS

A. Develop a Question Focus

A Question Focus (QFocus) is a brief statement, problem, or concern that serves as a “focus” for participants to ask questions about. It can be a topic you want to discuss with participants or can be a concern that participants may want to think about and understand better.

In using the Voice in Decisions Technique, the QFocus should always be or include a **decision**. Otherwise the participant will not be able to ask questions about reason, process, and role.

Here are examples of a QFocus for the Voice in Decisions Technique:

- At the doctor’s office: “Your doctor is **changing** your medication.”
- At the school: “Your child is being **referred** for a special education evaluation.”
- Getting benefits: “Your benefits might be **cut**.”

The bolded words are the decision.

One very important rule to make the process work: *the QFocus should NOT be a question*. If the QFocus is a question, participants may try to answer it instead of coming up with their own questions.

Developing QFocus:

- Designing a QFocus yourself: If you are leading a session or have a specific goal for using the VIDT, you will probably design a QFocus ahead of time. You can create one that will get participants easily asking questions about the topic or concern you want them to be thinking about.
- Creating a QFocus with participant: When you use the VIDT with an individual, it may be best to hear from them about what they want to talk about or why they came to the office/program where you are working. That concern can then serve as the QFocus.

If the participants are coming up with the QFocus, do that step now. Say, *what would you like to ask questions about?* Then, go to step B and introduce the rules for producing questions (see below).

If, instead, YOU are providing them with the QFocus, tell them that you will be providing a topic for asking questions. But before giving them the QFocus, go to step B. and introduce the rules for producing questions (see below).

B. Introduce the rules for producing questions

Say to your participant, *I want to share four rules that will make it much easier to come up with some questions.*

1. Ask as many questions as you can.
2. Do not stop to answer, judge, or discuss questions.
3. Write down every question exactly as stated.
4. Change any statements into questions.

A COUPLE OF TIPS FOR WHEN YOU'RE WORKING WITH INDIVIDUALS:

- For rule #3, ask the participant to write the questions exactly as they come to mind.
- You can write down the questions or ask participants to write them. Make sure the participant feels comfortable writing the questions.

TIP FOR WHEN YOU'RE WORKING WITH GROUPS:

- For rule #3, the scribe (the person chosen to write all the questions) should not edit the questions that people contribute. If the scribe is a participant, they should also add questions to the list.

Give participants a moment to think about and discuss one or both of these questions:

- *What might be difficult about following these rules?*
- *Which of these rules might be difficult for you to follow? Why?*

C. Producing questions

State the Question Focus.

Instruct participants to ask as many questions as possible about the Question Focus, to follow the rules, and to number the questions.

SOME TIPS:

- It is VERY important that you do not give examples of questions.
- Do not explain the Question Focus when introducing it.
- Allow time for participants to generate as many questions as possible.

Don't worry if people are not coming up with a lot of questions. This is maybe the first time that they are doing this kind of thinking. If you notice that they are not coming up with many questions, help them focus on a word or two in the Question Focus and to ask questions related to those words.

D. Improving questions (OPTIONAL STEP)

Now you will facilitate some work with closed and open-ended questions.

This step is OPTIONAL – you can include it if you have enough time.

- Provide definitions for two types of questions: closed and open-ended.
 - **Closed-ended questions** - can be answered with **“yes”** or **“no”** or with one word. It may be helpful to explain that closed-ended questions often begin with **“is”**, **“does”**, **“can”**, and **“are”**.
 - **Open-ended questions** - require an explanation. It may be helpful to explain that open-ended questions often begin with **“why”**, **“how”**, and **“what”**.

- Ask participants to categorize the questions as closed or open-ended by marking them with a “C” or an “O”.
- Ask participants to practice changing questions from one type to another as follows:
 - Change one open-ended question into a closed-ended question
 - Change one closed-ended question into an open-ended question

E. Focusing questions on decisions

Remind participants about these three key elements of a decision:

THE REASON – the basis for a decision

THE PROCESS – the steps and actions taken, people involved, information used

YOUR ROLE – the part you play in the decision-making process

Ask participants to do the following, one at a time:

- **Find one question** on their list that will help them learn about the REASON(S) for the decision. If they don't have a question related to reason, ask them to come up with one and add it to the list.
- **Find one question** that will help them learn about the PROCESS for making the decision. If they don't have a question related to process, ask them to come up with one and add it to the list.
- **Find one question** that will help them learn about their ROLE /the ROLE of the people affected by the decision. If they don't have a question related to role, ask them to come up with one and add it to the list.

A COUPLE OF TIPS:

- Be sure to let them to find the examples on their own.
 - If they don't quickly find a question from one of the categories, encourage them to ask a new one.
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F. Sharing (OPTIONAL STEP - only for use in group settings)

If you have divided participants into groups, ask each group to share with the whole group or with another group:

- The questions they changed from open to closed and from closed to open (if you chose to include this optional step)
- Their questions related to reason, process, and role

G. Reflecting

Ask participants to think about what they learned and how they can use it. This step is VERY important—make sure not to skip. When participants name for themselves what they have learned it deepens their understanding of all the thinking they've done. Ask:

- *What did you learn?*
- *How can you use what you learned?*

You have just given the people with whom you work a rare opportunity to spend time learning how to ask better questions about decisions that affect them. They can now take this skill with them wherever they go.

