

Framing and Weather Reporting



Two key skills Rhizome recommends when facilitating or training groups are 'framing' and 'weather reporting':

Framing

Framing is setting the context and direction for a discussion. It sets boundaries to the discussion, in the same way that a picture frame marks the limits of the picture.

The wording and tone used at the beginning of a training session or a meeting influences the way in which the group develops. Sometimes framing can limit this growth and thus can create conflict as people break out of the framing that was set at the start.

Framing can also be used with active listening throughout a meeting or training session to reflect on what is (you perceive to be) happening in the group. For example, it can be used to highlight how much agreement there is in a group discussion, as a way of maintaining momentum.

Weather Reporting

Active listening is commonly focused on listening to one person, to clarify what an individual speaker is saying during coaching, mediation or in a meeting or workshop. It's

equally useful in listening to what's happening in an entire group, then reporting on it to help move the group on.

This is sometimes called 'weather reporting'. It is a form of framing in that it frames the emotional state or mood of the group. It can be a way of naming an underlying conflict, or going deeper into an issue to facilitate it being tackled.

Aims and examples of framing and weather reporting

Highlight what the group has achieved

"We've shared lots of interesting ideas. It feels like we're almost at the point at which we can move on to the next stage..."

Summarise what people think

"It seems to me that some people think X and others think Y", or
 "It looks like we are all in agreement" or
 "There is a strong disagreement that doesn't look like it's going to be resolved yet" or
 "Many of you seem a little tired and could probably do with a break... is that right?", or
 "It feels like things are getting a bit heated..."

Raise issues around time

"This exercise/discussion is taking longer than we planned for, do you want to stop or continue?"

Combining the elements

Individual reports can be rolled together to move to the next stage or unblock a discussion:

“It seems like we’re a little tired, and this exercise is taking us longer than we were expecting. But we’re almost there. Shall we take a break and then come back for the final push?”

In Rhizome’s experience, individuals or groups may need more framing when they are scared, stuck, or in conflict. Groups also need help to recognise their achievements, resolutions and positive moments, not just their problems. Without this help, an individual or a group can get burned out, or repeat a cycle of conflict without realising that they’re doing this, or even that they’ve solved it and are simply stuck in responding as they did before.

Framing can help a group move past moments of conflict, uncertainty and low energy. It works because:

- The group is reassured that somebody knows what is really going on;
- It enables people to see an issue in the context of the whole group, and can help clarify their perspective within that context;
- It presents the group with an opportunity to reflect, and decide how to respond to whatever is going on.



Rhizome’s Top Tips for framing effectively



- **Use your own experiences** as a way of checking out a group’s experience: ‘I know I’m feeling tired, how do you feel?’ This gives people an opportunity to admit thoughts and feelings without losing face, and can support a key experience only felt by certain people on the group’s margins.
- **Use framing with empathy** and without judgement.
- **Offer your framing tentatively:** “am I right in thinking that...”, “it seems to me as if...” and then actively listen to the responses.
- **Frame only when the group seems to need it**, e.g. if they are not acknowledging an important issue.