



**Top 10 workshop scenarios you  
should be able to handle**  
2023 edition by Pioneers

**This presentation shows a collection of difficult workshop scenarios and how you can best handle them.**



# WORKSHOP SCENARIOS

**#1** People are late or missing

**#2** Silence when asking to present

**#3** Awkward silence after presenting

**#4** Low morning motivation

**#5** Criticizing and challenging content

**#6** Discussions going nowhere

**#7** Presentations going overtime

**#8** Big tech problems

**#9** No energy in the afternoon

**#10** Running out of time

+ **BONUS: SCENARIO #11**  
A key participant is missing

# #1

# People are late or missing

## The scenario

You want to start your workshop but a lot of people are still missing.  
People are sitting around in silence and wait what to do.  
Nobody takes action or feels responsible to look where the others are.

## Challenge

- Awkward silence
- Impatient audience

## Goal

- Get people to the meeting
- Bridge waiting time

## Actions to take

- Make sure everybody in the workshop knows what's going on (you are still waiting for people).
- Tell people: "We are waiting 5 min more, you can get a coffee in the meantime."
- Send a reminder email to everyone who is not there yet.
- Ask colleagues in the room if they know something or can look into the internal calendars from the missing people.
- If it's getting really critical and you need one specific person, call the person.
- Get started after 10-15 min max otherwise people will get bored and disappear as well.
- Welcome late-joiners and onboard them to where you are standing and what you are doing.

### **Actions you can take before:**

If you need one critical person to be there e.g. keynote speaker invite this person 15 min earlier before going on stage.



# #2

# Silence when asking to present

## The scenario

After asking participants or groups to present their learnings or findings nobody talks.  
When doing an introduction round, no one starts presenting themselves.  
There is silence in the room, nobody wants to be the first to present or talk.

## Challenge

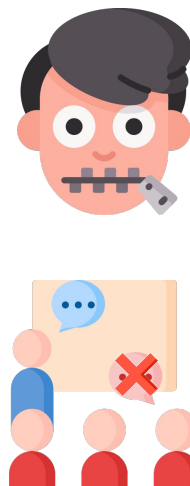
- Awkward silence
- No one is taking initiative to present or talk

## Goal

- Get people to be the first to present/talk
- Break the silence
- Start conversations

## Actions to take

- Make a funny comment about the fact that there are no volunteers (“You are all so polite wanting to give the others time for talking” or alike “Who wants to pioneer?”).
- Offer to pick someone randomly.
- Offer to do it in alphabetical order.
- Offer to choose the learnings/topics in random or alphabetical order (only works if topics are dedicated to a specific person or group).
- If the group has a team leader ask him/her to propose an order/topic or start him/herself.
- Offer to pick a person in a funny way i.e. throw paper ball, paper, stone, scissors, etc. (if it fits the atmosphere).
- Ask the first person to hand the “ball” to the next person.



# #3

# Awkward silence after presenting

## The scenario

After presenting workshop content there is an awkward silence in the room. You feel something went wrong or the audience does not understand it. Maybe the audience understood it, but they stay silent and seem unexcited.

## Challenge

- Awkward silence
- No one is taking initiative to give feedback or talk

## Goal

- Get people to talk after a presentation
- Break silence
- Start conversations

## Actions to take

- Try to end your session with an action item, so the frontal session doesn't "hang in the air" but there's already a task people can get excited about.
- End your session by asking a question like "Does that make sense for you?" and try to open the room for questions.
- Give them time to answer, count slowly until 7 seconds are over .
- If the awkward silence remains, try to repeat/summarize the main learning of the session briefly in a different wording, maybe using simpler sentences.
- Give one extra example! If the task or the session's main idea gets lost, it's always easier for people to understand through a concrete example.
- Avoid calling people out directly (and potentially make them uncomfortable) but if you can refer to a previous comment or question of a person that would help understand the session, address it and use it for clarification.
- Make it personal, ask people which you can address directly "Florian, what does it mean to your business unit?"



# #4 Low morning motivation

## The scenario

A workshop takes place in the morning.  
Everybody is tired, nobody has their camera turned on in an online setting.  
Nobody unmutes their microphone. There are no emotions in the room.

## Challenge

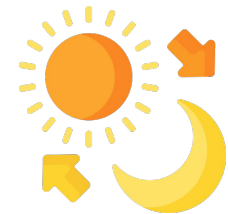
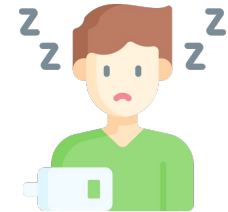
- Awkward silence
- Unmotivated people
- No initiative to participate

## Goal

- Motivate people to participate
- Get energy & emotion into the room

## Actions to take

- Start with an energizer / ice breaker (→ find our top 10 workshop games and energizers [HERE](#)).
- Ask them to point out something fun that they can notice around them.
- Use interactive tools e.g. Miro to engage people by describing themselves based on 3 pictures and a fun fact.
- Q&A, make participants share their expectations about today's workshop.
- Ask people actively to turn on the cameras, call people out (nicely) “Hey X, you didn’t manage to turn your camera on yet”
- Introduce the workshop rules - no emails, no phone calls, camera on, active participation, etc.
- Weather check-in - “How are you feeling today? Describe your mood with a certain weather.”



# #5

# Criticizing & challenging content

## The scenario

After giving input about a methodology and explaining it, somebody is challenging your methodology and criticizing it.

E.g. “Customer interviews don’t make sense. They are far too long. Let’s use a quick whatsapp survey instead.”

## Challenge

- Misunderstanding explanations
- Critical, judgemental and negative comments

## Goal

- Motivate people to participate
- Get energy and emotions into the room

## Actions to take

- Stay calm and don’t get defensive right away.
- Show appreciation for the person sharing their criticism: “Thanks a lot for being proactive and sharing your concerns with us. Interesting that you had this experience because we already had very interesting and valuable results using this method in the past.”
- Remember that your presentation is not just for the person who made the critical comment, but also for the audience. It's important to address any concerns that have been raised, but also to move on with your presentation.
- If there is enough time: Ask in what situation the person didn’t have valuable experience with the method? Find a reason why this time it will be different or state examples where it worked very well, going into detailed steps how we used this method.
- If there is no time: state that you can talk about it one on one after the session or during the break to share some more insights, how the method can bring the desired results.
- If the person continues criticizing: “Please, you are currently disturbing the progress of the rest of this group. Let’s talk about your hesitations later.”





## The scenario

There are a lot of talks and discussions in the room but no progress on paper.  
In workshop groups or breakout sessions nobody is filling out the tools (e.g. canvases).  
In a very senior round of people, without a workshop facilitator/moderator or person documenting outcomes, discussions go around in circles and no progress is made.

## Challenge

- Endless conversations
- No real progress with tasks or tools

## Goal

- Motivate people to get things done not just talk about them

## Actions to take

### Before the workshop:

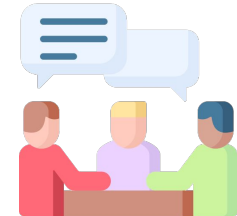
- Prepare an agenda with predefined time slots for each block.
- Agree with key stakeholders on the desired outcome of the workshop & the agenda.

### During the workshop:

- Introduce agenda and goal of the meeting, ensuring everyone knows each others roles & responsibilities.
- Mention your role as moderator and time-keeper.
- Stick to a “speaking-order” when many people want to say something at the same time.
- Use a “parking-lot” for topics that are not directly connected to the workshop or are too extensive to discuss in the meeting. Refer to the agenda.
- Define clear to-do’s and next steps for topics that are unresolved or in progress.

### After the workshop:

- Follow up with an email, appreciating everyone’s contribution, recap of the workshop, next steps and responsibilities.



## The scenario

Teams pitch their ideas in a final presentation/pitch which is predetermined to a maximum number of minutes and they go way over time (in open / event-like setting). Someone presents an exercise or canvas and they talk too long (in a closed setting).

## Challenge

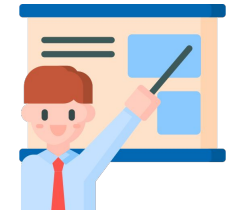
- Talking too long
- Not enough time for other participants
- Falling behind agenda

## Goal

- Make presentations in set amount of time
- Nobody uses other's presenting time

## Actions to take

- Know ahead of time if too much content is planned for a pitch / timeslot → Help them shorten it
- Practice ahead of time with a coach.
- Do a dry run with a timekeeper.
- Help the presenter shorten unnecessary sentences.
- Keep a clock timer ticking down the countdown during pitch.
- Show presenter the clock when their time comes to an end. Have a big timer for teams to see the time.
- If they don't finish within 30 seconds of the allotted time, start clapping.
- Move closer to the presenter as a moderator to signal to them the next one is coming up (on-site).
- Write the presenter a message on Zoom saying "1 more minute".
- Hold up a carton/paper saying time is up and clap after 30 seconds.
- Mute them after 30 seconds overtime if the event takes place online.
- If they present in a closed setting, interrupt and tell them when they only have (x time /1 minute) left to present, they should come to an end.



# #8 Big tech problems

## The scenario

During an online workshop there are big tech problems, such as the person supposed to present cannot share their screen or they are lagging due to bad internet connection.

## Challenge

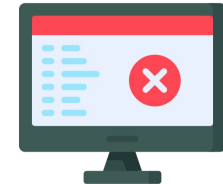
- Bad internet connection
- Problems with log in
- Difficulties sharing screen and presenting

## Goal

- Resolve the internet problems
- Work around the tech-issues

## Actions to take

- Have a backup plan: Have alternative solutions for presenting or sharing information in case of technical difficulties.
- Ask person to send the slides over to you and you share your screen.
- Ask person to send it per email to all participants and present (and mention the slide number person is talking about).
- If it takes too long to send, ask person to present without the screen (depending on type of the content) and send through afterwards.
- Check the technical requirements: Before the workshop, make sure that all participants have the necessary equipment and software to join the session, and that they have tested these in advance.
- If the problem persists, try switching to a different platform or application for the workshop, such as a different video conferencing tool.



# #9

# No energy in the afternoon

## The scenario

It's afternoon the energy is down. After lunch the participants get into an afternoon slump. People have trouble listening and participating. They need to be re-energized.

## Challenge

- Unmotivated people
- Nobody is participating
- No energy after lunch

## Goal

- Motivate people to participate after lunch
- Get people energized

## Actions to take

- Get everybody away from the work they are doing for a minute (get them away from their desks, materials, etc.) - make them take a break, physically and mentally.
- Energizer game → Include physical activity, get everyone up and moving ([Check out our energizers](#)).
- Quick break → Make everybody get a coffee, refills their drinks, etc.
- Motivate people and give them an outlook for the remaining workshop time (→“This is the last agenda point for today, let’s push one more time”, “Let’s go full energy for the final hour - we will relax and have a drink afterwards”, etc.)
- Bring in surprise guest / do an impulse talk for 5 mins (could be a colleague, expert, etc.).
- Plan space for the afternoon slump and things potentially getting slower in the agenda beforehand.
- Bring interesting/controversial topics after lunch to spark interested and ignite conversations.



# #10 Running out of time

## The scenario

You are running out of time to reach the workshop goals.  
You have a clear outcome in mind that needs to be finished by the end of the workshop and you are confident it cannot be done in the remaining time.

## Challenge

- Falling behind agenda
- No more time for important points
- A task needs to be done before moving on

## Goal

- Motivate people to get to the point
- Stay within time
- Push for reaching goals

## Actions to take

- No matter how much time, always make sure to have a structured ending of the workshop.
- Identify the most important goals for the workshop and focus on achieving those first.
- Prioritize on key action points that participants need to take & next steps.
- Be transparent and let participants know you have a time constraint.
- Write a good summary and next steps to transfer content that you missed during the meeting.
- In a smaller round, ask if the participants have 15 more minutes.
- If it is really important from a sprint methodology perspective, reschedule another meeting.
- Give the goal as a homework and follow up in a stand-up.
- Learn from earlier workshops and redesign the sprints to fit your new timeline.
- Time all your activities to have an early warning if you're already in delay.
- Plan in more transition time between the different workshop phases.



# #11 Key participant is missing

## The scenario

A key participant for the workshop, such as a speaker or expert, cannot connect when the workshop takes place online.

The key participant does not show up after repeated reach-outs.

## Challenge

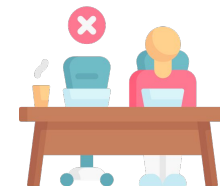
- Key participant doesn't show up
- Content & workshop can't go on without them

## Goal

- Reach participant and get them to join
- Clarify situation
- Find alternative ways to go on

## Actions to take

- Postpone the start by 10-15 minutes - try to clarify the situation (e.g. delay or no show, try to connect in alternative ways).
- If no show is clarified, options are:
  - Reschedule workshop (only in extreme cases).
  - Execute workshop and align to onboard absent person later - consolidate in a short joint meeting afterwards.
  - Identify a replacement: If possible, identify a replacement or substitute for the missing participant. This could be another team member or an external expert.
  - Be flexible: Be willing to adjust the agenda or format of the workshop to accommodate for the missing participant.
  - Switch time slots, continue with next planned agenda point.
- Learn from the experience: Reflect on what steps you can take to minimize the risk of a key participant being unable to connect or not showing up again in the future.



If you like this collection connect with us on LinkedIn, so we can keep in touch and exchange on further great workshop techniques & tools.

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