

# WE ARE IN YOUR HANDS

Handbook for UNFCCC Facilitators

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## Introduction

Welcome to the handbook you wish you'd read at the beginning of your UNFCCC facilitation career. Whether you're a fresh-faced facilitator or a wise old dinosaur on the verge of extinction, there's something here for you.

Unlike other handbooks filled with technical and procedural content, this one hits differently. It's filled with reflections, strategies and tools from your own colleagues. In the following pages you'll find hard-earned knowledge you can use to build ambitious climate agreements.

Some of you are already thinking "Not another handbook, I'm busy enough!"

It's true that you're rushing between agenda items, fighting to stay awake through procedural marathons, and somehow surviving back-to-back meetings before collapsing on your flight home.

With your busy schedule in mind, this book was written with the aim to **Make Facilitation Fun Again**. After you've thumbed through the pages, perhaps you'll return to your work with a chuckle, feeling ready to take on your role with lightness, energy and focus.

## Why another handbook?

At the core of your job lies a contradiction.

You've volunteered for a role in an organisation based on consensus decision-making, where most directives fall within the categories of do's and don'ts. Yet there is no consensus on what it means to be a good facilitator. The result of this contradiction is that many of the existing handbooks (such as the Guide for Presiding Officers) tell you what to do, but not how to do it.

This booklet contains the (not so) secret combination of insider information that unlocks the next level of your work, distilled from 16 interviews with former and present chairs and facilitators. While there is no consensus on what it means to be a successful facilitator, there are patterns, proven practices, and a range of choices at your disposal.

What follows is a set of eight propositions to take with you on your facilitation journey. Think of them as core capacities, tools to help you navigate climate negotiations with more intention, confidence, and ease. Each one comes with bite-sized take-aways and a splash of theory (for when you want to go deeper, or just sound impressive on a panel).

Here's a little trick: think of this booklet like one of those flight safety cards tucked into the seat pocket in front of you. It won't fly the plane, but it might help you get safely through the turbulence. So buckle up, flip the page, and let's get started.

## A note on the contributors

While the list of contributors is anonymous, you might be curious to know more about who contributed to this Handbook. They come from both Annex I and Non-Annex I countries (50-50), are men and women (9 and 7), and have diverse experiences as both young and seasoned facilitators and SB/SB-STA Chairs. If you've been in the process for a while, you might be able to guess who's who by reading the quotes ;)

Reviews for

### WE ARE IN YOUR HANDS

*This is a book I honestly wish someone gave me two years ago before I started facilitating. It feels like a gem full of quiet wisdom, something to keep looking to, to get me through negotiations.*

*Give it a read, you won't be disappointed!*

**Patricia Nying'uro**  
Kenyan Delegation

*There are many climate change negotiators' handbooks out there, however this one is unique. In very short concise but insightful commentaries, experienced negotiators provide their experiences on what works and does not work. And it is portable! You can take it apart and use it as a cheat sheet!*

**Carlos Fuller**  
Belizean Delegation

*This handbook is the most approachable information on facilitation I have encountered. If you're interested in learning about how to be an effective facilitator in the negotiations or if you're curious about what makes a good facilitator, I highly recommend reading this handbook. Digestible, informative, and funny.*

**Jacqui Ruesga**  
New Zealand Delegation

*The role of a chair or facilitator in helping parties reach agreement is not just a technical or legal process, it is also a human journey. This handbook provides many valuable insights on how to prepare that journey, to look beyond just applying the rules of procedure and to explore ways to work with the people in the room to build the collective confidence that is so essential for building solutions together.*

**Paul Watkinson**  
French Delegation

# PROPOSITION 1

## TAKE YOUR SPACE

*“Don’t just be a robot following the script - be you in the seat.”*

### Why it Matters

Beyond your written mandate lies a crucial "permission space" that you need to claim to be effective. You've got to step into it, own it, and make it yours. This is the difference between going through the motions of facilitating, and actually facilitating.

### In Practice

After stepping into your role, your first task is to prepare the conditions for agreement. Beyond your written mandate lies something less explicit but just as crucial: the "permission space" granted by your colleagues to get the job done.

*“When you’re a new Facilitator, the people in the room are unlikely to allow you very much freedom. And yet the thing I would have told myself is: find the permission space to operate more freely.”*

If you don't take up this permission space, you are only reading off the page. Effective facilitators step beyond the rulebook and start to model tone, interaction, and direction from the get-go. By creating your permission space, you're inviting the room to engage with intention.

*“Sometimes you can get led by rules of procedure, and by what you see other people do, or what you think everyone is doing, and then you follow that mold. I was more successful once I was more myself. Don't just be a robot following the script, be you in the seat.”*

What this looks like will differ for everyone. For some it means asking pointed questions, for others it means stepping off the podium to engage the complexity in the room.

*“In the middle of a session, I got off the podium and walked to her seat and knelt down and we had a little sidebar while everyone else was waiting... Then I went back to the podium and I gave her the floor again, and she agreed. Going beyond the script, beyond the podium, can be effective as well.”*

What matters most is that you envision your own proactive stance, and then take initiative. Passive facilitation tends to recreate impasses.

When you default to simply calling flags, you risk reinforcing the existing dynamic instead of shifting it.

*“I have said to negotiators, ‘I will do this role if you allow me to facilitate in a genuine way... But if you think that I'm the person who sits at the front and says whose turn it is to talk, then I don't think I want to do that.’”*

Stepping into this space requires a bit of self-reflection.

Ask yourself:

- What is my personal definition of success, and how do I lead us towards that?
- What kind of atmosphere do I want to create?
- How do I want my colleagues to feel after they leave the room?
- How is my permission space complementary with that of my co-facilitator, and how can I support them to take their own space?

These aren't theoretical questions, they're strategic decisions that help shape your tone, choices, and presence. The more clearly you define your role and intentions for yourself, the more successfully you'll embody it for others.

### Take-Aways

#### Positioning is power:

The best Facilitators step into their authority with purpose and presence in order to shape the conditions for shared direction and consensus.

#### Create conditions for engagement:

By owning your role confidently, you invite participants to engage more meaningfully.

#### Be more than a moderator:

You're not just keeping order, you're shaping the interaction, energy, and possibility within your room.

### Theory and Analysis

#### Positioning Theory (Harré & van Langenhove)

In high-stakes settings, authority is claimed, negotiated, and sometimes resisted. A Facilitator's role must be actively shaped. If they do not position themselves with confidence and clarity, others will do it for them.

#### Narrative Agency (Sara Cobb)

Facilitators shape the 'story' of a session not just through formal statements but by nudging the narrative architecture. By choosing when to intervene, when to reframe, and when to hold silence, they reshape the plot.

# PROPOSITION 2

## GAIN PERSPECTIVE

*"The biggest issue in the UNFCCC process is that many times we fail to see the big picture."*

### Why it Matters

When you're deep in the grind of negotiations, it's easy to lose sight of the big picture. Understanding the meta-dynamics - the relationships between sessions, timelines, moods, and mandates - lets you act more strategically, and more calmly. Facilitators who hold the wider view are better equipped to help negotiators move when they're stuck. They sense how different threads are tangled together, and act accordingly.

### In Practice

Perspective doesn't come from the agenda, it comes from context. Try to think of your own consultation not as a sequence of meetings, but as a weave in the larger UNFCCC tapestry. The textile is interwoven with all the topics being discussed, and if there's a pull in the fabric somewhere else, it can show up in your room. Recognizing that your room is part of a much bigger negotiation can help you be more flexible, less reactive, and responsive to subtle shifts happening around you.

*"We're firm believers that everything needs to be negotiated on its own, but some issues do get tangled."*

*"Almost every single session, there is a moment where you're kind of like, 'Okay, we're in a holding pattern. We're waiting until either the dance in this room is finished or the situation in another room is finished.'"*

You are not completely beholden to the dynamics outside your room, however. You can gain a proactive edge by tuning into the mood of your own contact group. Use your colleagues as sensors giving you important data about what's happening outside.

*"If negotiators are coming back to back from a negotiation that didn't show progress, it is likely they will bring a bit of a bad mood in the room. Or if the negotiations were very good and progressive, they would bring that good mood in the room."*

*"Before I go into the hall I will ask, 'How did that negotiation go? What was the mood? Was there any progress? What were the issues?'"*

Try to unknot the threads being fed into your weave: national mandates and negotiating positions in other rooms. Feed this broader perspective in the daily meetings held by SB Chairs, which offer space to flag cross-cutting issues, share insights, and receive guidance. When in doubt, check with Heads of Delegation or seek out members of the Secretariat to discuss larger dynamics.

*"Have lots of meetings with Heads of Delegation so that the negotiators in the room have permission to let go of things that they'd held on to dearly for so many years. Heads of delegation can make the judgment of 'Now come on, my negotiator, you are not going to die in a ditch over that.'"*

While staying aware of interconnected issues, you don't need to resolve them all - that's a core task of the SB Chairs and the Presidency. Finally, don't forget that you're in this for the long haul. Setting your sights on a longer time horizon can help you to relax into your role without pushing for agreement too soon. Masterful weaving takes time.

*"I never see the UNFCCC process year by year, I see it as a sort of evolution. If you think that you need to reach a mile every year for everything, then you will not be happy in this process. You shouldn't be too happy, because it is slow."*

### Take-Aways

#### Map the ecosystem:

Understand how your negotiation connects to other topics, rooms, and power dynamics.

#### Track mood patterns:

Recognize how energy and attitudes transfer between sessions and use this awareness strategically.

#### Embrace evolution:

See negotiations as part of a longer journey rather than discrete events requiring immediate resolution.

### Theory and Analysis

#### Organisational Sensemaking (Wieck)

Making sense of complex, fast-moving environments means watching for patterns, not just facts. In addition to mandates and positions, facilitators must interpret mood, momentum, and metaphor.

#### Ripeness Theory (Zartman)

Not all moments are equally conducive to resolution. Facilitators who understand the concept of "ripeness" can identify when parties are truly ready to move, rather than forcing progress prematurely.

# PROPOSITION 3

## MAKE FRIENDS

*"There are times where we have been able to remove barriers and get an agreement because we knew each other and respected each other as people."*

### Why it Matters

Facilitation doesn't only happen from the podium; it takes place in friendly hallway chats, WhatsApp threads, and quiet conversations at the bar. This isn't about being best pals, but about building familiarity and trust. Friendships allow people to speak with more honesty, and explore flexible positions.

### In Practice

If you want traction in tough negotiations, relational groundwork matters just as much as procedural know-how. That's why building rapport outside the formal structure is a facilitator's secret superpower.

*"I know people's kids' names. I know where they went on vacation. I know who recently got married, who recently got divorced... Sometimes it feels like we all get put into that room and locked up for two weeks, and it helps to remember each other's humanity."*

Effective facilitation requires a nuanced understanding of diverse positions, as well as the people advocating for them. Being friends with other delegates is not in your job description, but it gives you the chance to know your material in a way that a towering stack of policy documents cannot.

Beyond subject matter knowledge, friendships might be the biggest resource you have when it comes to un-sticking formal negotiating positions that seem immovable or irreconcilable. Friends will entrust you with the information needed to read the subtexts holding sticky positions in place.

*"It doesn't work if the people in the room don't, on some level, feel like you're friends, because that is what gives them the ability to say, 'Hey, listen. I know this is what we said in the room, but you know how it is. Maybe in the next round we could consider that.'"*

You don't need grand gestures. A coffee in the morning. A WhatsApp during a break. A warm hello in the hallway. These small human signals build momentum in ways that formal exchanges often cannot. And remember, a little warmth before day one makes navigating tough moments on day four that much easier.

*"My biggest preparation probably happens a day before we all arrive. I start to text people and say, 'Hi, how you going? Can't wait to see you in Bonn.' If you reach out before the session, by the time you see each other it's already flowing."*

When negotiations get tense, an ability to navigate together can make the difference. When used well, informality is not a weakness but a strategy.

*"Don't be afraid to be informal. Don't be afraid to reach out via WhatsApp... You're still on the podium, you're just connecting through different means."*

A word of caution: friendships should span across the spectrum of negotiation groups. If parties perceive that a facilitator is aligned too closely with one group, trust can quickly erode. Effective facilitators consciously build relationships with all sides to maintain credibility and neutrality.

### Take-Aways

#### Humanize the process:

Personal connections remind everyone that behind positions are people with shared concerns.

#### Relationships are the real infrastructure:

Important breakthroughs often happen outside formal sessions through trust-based conversations.

#### Invest before intensity:

Establishing rapport early creates resilience for when negotiations become difficult.

### Theory and Analysis

#### Social Capital Theory (Putnam)

Relationship networks create valuable social capital - shared norms, trust, and reciprocity - that reduces transaction costs and enables cooperation when formal incentives alone would be insufficient.

#### Loose Coupling (Weick)

In complex systems like the UNFCCC, formal authority and informal influence are loosely yet unavoidably connected to how things get done. Trust flows through informal channels like WhatsApp messages, hallway chats, and personal stories. Facilitators who work within this "invisible web" of soft relationships can shift outcomes that seem stuck by formal means.

#### Narrative Coherence (Cobb)

When people feel known and understood, their messages are interpreted more generously. Missteps are seen as quirks, not threats. Facilitators who cultivate these relationships help groups maintain narrative coherence even in disagreement.

# PROPOSITION 4

## HUMOR US!

### Why it Matters

Climate change is an urgent matter and you have a significant responsibility, but serious doesn't have to mean solemn. Despite the gravity of your task - or because of it - take the inverse approach and use humor to release pressure, reset energy, and bring a room back to life when it's dragging under the weight of process.

### In Practice

An appropriate, well-timed joke does more than get laughs – it signals your confidence in handling the room, conveys a sense of safety, and provides needed perspective. In tense moments, it can be the difference between deadlock and dialogue.

*“I strive to create a good atmosphere in the room by telling them that they are beautiful... they're so stressed out that if you try to just loosen them up a little bit, they really appreciate it.”*

Humor also highlights the human element of negotiations, which can get lost in technical discussions. By acknowledging shared experiences, like the absurdity of marathon sessions or bureaucratic procedures, you give everyone permission to momentarily step back and breathe.

*“There are lots of instances where, if you make a joke about the fact that you've been in a room for 20 plus hours, and how that's not normal, people go ‘Yeah, that's right, this isn't cool.’ Doing that breaks the ice and puts people at ease.”*

When negotiators share a laugh, they're also sharing a moment of connection that reminds them of their common purpose. Shared experiences can orient toward shared goals rather than oppositional positions. Effective facilitators recognize this, and deliberately incorporate appropriate humor to warm up the room and build the foundation for productive compromise.

One last thing to remember: What's funny to one party might be confusing or even offensive to another, particularly in a multilingual setting. Ironic or sarcastic humour can be especially risky. Use humour with sensitivity to language and cultural differences.

### Take-Aways

#### Transform tension through levity:

Well-timed humor can defuse charged moments and reset negative dynamics.

#### Remind people of shared humanity:

Laughter creates connection across divides and rehumanizes those seen as adversaries.

#### Invest before intensity:

Appropriate humor demonstrates your comfort with complexity and builds trust in your leadership.

### Theory and Analysis

#### Relief Theory (Freud and Spencer)

Humor provides a release from psychological tension. In high-stakes or emotionally charged environments, laughter functions as a valve that reduces pressure and allows a fresh start.

#### Reframing Theory (Watzlawick)

Humor functions as a powerful reframing device in conflict settings, allowing parties to see familiar situations from new perspectives. By shifting frames through humor, facilitators create cognitive openings for solutions that weren't visible within previous frameworks.

#### Affect Control Theory (Heise)

Humor strategically disrupts negative emotional trajectories in negotiations by introducing positive affect, creating psychological space for more constructive interaction patterns to emerge.

# PROPOSITION 5

## LISTEN LISTEN LISTEN

*"You have to build an understanding of what is doable and what is needed."*

### Why it Matters

Facilitators are often reminded to "listen," but what does that really mean? Real listening is about catching the bigger story beneath the statements, noticing what people aren't saying, and spotting tiny shifts in position before they're announced. Skilled listening is what enables a facilitator to anticipate roadblocks before they solidify, sense movement before it's declared, and spot consensus before it's named.

### In Practice

Effective facilitators understand that there are several kinds of listening, each of which can be employed for various ends. The first kind of listening is to understand your negotiation as a whole. You could call this **Big Picture Listening**.

*"Quickly get a sense of the forces in the room, an understanding of the dynamic between parties and the two or three issues that will really make a difference."*

This kind of macro-listening lets you track where positions are converging or diverging. It also allows you to grasp the shape, components, and dynamics of the negotiation. With this information you can orient yourself in the room, prioritize issues, and move towards potential landing zones.

In addition to this wide-angle view, you should also listen for what's not being said: what's hidden in emphasis, silence, or vague language. You could call this **Negative Space Listening**.

*"This question of being able to hear behind the words, and to reinterpret what is being said into something that is workable for all parties is one of the most important parts of the process to me."*

*"You need to hear what's not been said. You do that from listening to the choice of words, listening to where the emphasis is placed, and the topic. When something important is not raised, you make a mental note of that. It's probably something you need to flag at some point going forward."*

When listening for what's not being said, slow down and suspend your expectations. Play the role of detective searching for things that surprise you, or that don't make sense. Picking up clues helps you to craft questions and develop options. You'll additionally build trust with parties who get the feeling that you're listening to understand.

A third kind of listening is about change. While following the discussions, you might notice subtle shifts in the narrative: a previous position has been redefined, or perhaps elaborated with new information. This third and final type of listening helps to detect small shifts that suggest flexibility or a potential opening. You could call this **Track Changes Listening**.

*"You'll find people say little things that sound empty to people from outside the process, but they are the arrow I listen for. They'll say, 'This is our position, but we were intrigued by the proposal made by x, and maybe we can talk about it a little more.'.. It's an indication of movement."*

*"You can sometimes see just one sentence coming out of their mouths. 'Oh, that was the change in position. They are now more flexible on this topic.' That's how our common ground changes as we go."*

Bear in mind that negotiating group representatives often operate under strict mandates. Their language may be cautious, and their room to manoeuvre limited since they are often addressing multiple audiences: their group, their capitals, and other parties. Listen for subtle cues, especially in bilateral conversations or informal side meetings where signals may be more apparent.

Listening always comes with a purpose. If you're aware of why and how you listen, you'll be able to integrate all three kinds into your work. Think of these types of listening as different tools in your toolbox. By applying them at various moments throughout the negotiation, you'll be equipped to identify and guide the group towards potential landing zones.

### Take-Aways

#### **Develop multi-dimensional listening:**

Practice different types of listening to catch what's being said, unsaid, and what's shifting.

#### **Focus on narrative shifts:**

Small changes in language often signal important movement before it's formally declared.

#### **Listen for landing zones:**

Active listening helps identify where compromise might be possible and how to get there.

### Theory and Analysis

#### **Framing & Agenda-Setting (Entman)**

The act of listening shapes what you highlight, question, and build upon. The way facilitators "frame" emerging ideas will influence how others interpret and engage with them.

#### **Narrative Mediation (Winslade & Monk)**

Conflict emerges from competing narratives about the situation. By listening for how these narratives evolve, facilitators can identify moments when dominant stories shift, creating opportunities for new, shared narratives that accommodate diverse perspectives.

# PROPOSITION 6

## BEND THE RULES

*"You have to understand the rules in order to bend them."*

### Why it Matters

Yes, Rules and Procedures are essential to the UNFCCC process, they're what creates predictability and legitimacy. But they are not the whole story, since strict adherence without strategic thinking can stall progress. Effective facilitators know how to work within these boundaries without being boxed in by them, navigating between formal authority and real-time needs. Understanding Rules and Procedures within their greater social context gives you the confidence to improvise and the judgment to know when possible.

### In Practice

To begin with, let go of the pressure to know every rule in detail. It's good to remember that the Secretariat has your back. If needed, make use of the legal advisors or even the SB Chairs.

*"It's okay to not know everything... Having done it now, I know it's fine. There will be somebody that can answer the question. 'It's okay to say I don't know, let me check.'"*

The procedural frame gives you structure, but it can be flexed under certain conditions. Understanding what the rules allow and where they can flex will help you propose creative options without crossing red lines. This should be supplemented with your understanding of negotiators' positions, and the trust they give you to act.

*"There's a whole series of constraints. It has to be party driven, it has to be inclusive, it has to be open ended... But in the end, you can break all of the rules so long as you build up the political capital and the trust you need to be able to resolve things."*

In practice this might look like rearranging how a contact group works, creatively phrasing informal conclusions, or simply asking: "Is there another way we could do this within the mandate?" The key is transparency and inclusion. If you propose to stretch a rule, explain why and invite feedback. Progress made in small groups still needs to be shared back, since exclusion can lead to backlash and walkouts. Ground the change in service of progress, not convenience.

*"Knowing the rules is a tool. If you just know the rules but you cannot keep your promises, if you cannot be transparent and trustworthy, then don't even try."*

Try taking an active approach when interpreting the Rules and Procedures. You will know the most about how much you're able to bend by moving and grooving together with the group.

*"You have to understand the rules in order to bend them, otherwise you can easily break them. That understanding helps you know how far to push the envelope and when to pull back, because it's an interaction. It's a space where you go back and forth, you play with that space."*

### Take-Aways

#### **Master rules to transcend them:**

Deep understanding of procedure gives you the confidence to know when flexibility serves the process.

#### **Explain departures transparently:**

When bending rules, clearly connect your approach to the shared purpose.

#### **Build trust through judgment:**

Your credibility determines how much procedural creativity participants will accept.

### Theory and Analysis

#### **Policy Entrepreneurship** (Kingdon, Mintrom)

Facilitators, like policy entrepreneurs, move things forward by spotting opportunities within constraints. Their success often depends on knowing when to stick to the script, and when to write a new line.

#### **Discretionary Space** (Lipsky)

Frontline roles in complex systems often require individuals to interpret policy in real time. You are operating in the blurry space between protocol and progress. In this view, bending the rules isn't a violation but a feature of adaptive and responsive facilitation.

#### **Adaptive Leadership** (Heifetz)

Complex negotiations require distinguishing between technical problems (solvable through established procedures) and adaptive challenges (requiring new approaches). Skilled facilitators "regulate the temperature" by knowing when to adhere to familiar processes and when to encourage adaptive work.

# PROPOSITION 7

## EMOTIONS AIN'T ALL BAD

*"Sometimes it's useful to let emotions play themselves out... it helps other parties understand where they're coming from."*

### Why it Matters

Climate negotiations are incredibly complex geopolitical and technical events, but they're also deeply human. Behind every badge is a person carrying national pride, career pressures, and genuine passion to the table. Emotions are often treated as liabilities, but they can be rocket (bio) fuel when channeled right. Facilitators who work with emotion as a legitimate part of their work can transform tension into connection, and energy into momentum.

### In Practice

Emotional expression is unfortunately often equated with emotional outbursts. When this is the case, inviting emotions into the room can feel like a dangerous step towards distraction and derailment.

*"That's my challenge with allowing emotions to come in. I definitely had somebody scream at me because he was angry. Being angry is not the problem, it's how you convey it."*

The key is understanding that emotions themselves aren't the problem, it's how they show up that matters. Emotion doesn't derail the room, unacknowledged and unprocessed emotion does. Creating room for expression, within respectful bounds, can lead to deeper understanding.

*"Sometimes it's useful to let emotions play themselves out. Let anger be expressed, let fear be expressed, let anxiety be expressed. Sometimes it's advantageous because it helps other parties in understanding where they're coming from. It helps other parties, it's not a weakness."*

The first place to model this is with yourself. Grounding routines give facilitators the space to slow down and acknowledge their own emotional state without letting it spill unchecked.

*"Personally, I allow myself to feel what I feel. When I'm feeling overwhelmed and I need 10 minutes to cry about what is going on, I allow myself to do that and then compose myself."*

*"If you're standing, sit down. If you are sitting, change your position. This gives you that 15, 20 second break that you need to cool your head, because if you don't cool your head you're going to say something that you will regret later."*

*"I wash my face every night and every morning, and I put on some moisturizer and makeup. It keeps me sane. It's the five to 10 minutes that I take every morning that gives me an element of 'I'm still me here'... because otherwise I think I would get the Britney Spears tick."*

These rituals allow facilitators to model regulation without suppression. When you can process your own emotions, you not only have an edge when acting in tough situations, you also make it safer for others to do the same.

*"Some negotiators are really good at putting their emotions into words without crying or yelling or any of those things, and I think that helps. If you can put your feelings into words, and you're not attacking anybody, it will resonate with other negotiators."*

Finally, just as your emotions are yours to process, don't forget that your co-facilitator's process will differ from yours. Having a conversation about how you handle emotions together can help to maintain collective navigation through tricky emotional terrain.

### Take-Aways

#### **Distinguish emotion from behavior:**

The feeling isn't the problem, it's how it's channeled that matters.

#### **Model emotional intelligence:**

How you handle your own emotions sets the tone for how others will express theirs.

#### **Create space for constructive expression:**

Emotions signal what matters most to participants and can reveal core interests.

### Theory and Analysis

#### **Emotional Intelligence in Negotiation**

(Shapiro)

Emotions are sources of negotiation power and information. Facilitators skilled in emotional intelligence can help parties distinguish between core concerns (appreciation, affiliation, autonomy, status, and role) and substantive issues.

#### **Self-Regulation & Modeling** (Bandura)

Facilitators who demonstrate grounded emotion-handling build a climate of psychological safety. This encourages others to express themselves constructively.

#### **Conflict Transformation** (Lederach)

Sustainable agreements emerge not from suppressing difficult emotions but from transforming relationships to accommodate them. By creating constructive channels for emotional expression, facilitators help parties engage with the full complexity of their situation.

# PROPOSITION 8

## THE INGREDIENTS OF CONSENSUS

*“You need to manage your way through it in a way where everyone's kind of unhappy, but also satisfied that they did the best that they could, and they're able to justify it to their bosses.”*

### Why it Matters

At the end of the day, your job comes down to one thing: getting consensus. This isn't just about that ceremonial moment when the gavel drops and nobody objects. The real work of consensus is built over time through a careful dance of expectations, the perfect timing of proposals, and the navigation of behind-the-scenes politics. An effective facilitator understands the social, emotional, and political ingredients of consensus, and is well-equipped to steer the group toward a decision that holds.

### In Practice

While everyone in the room has shown up to address climate change, each negotiator's primary responsibility is to represent their national interests. On a practical level, consensus is deeply connected to national pride. Your success hinges on whether your colleagues can return home with their heads held high and their job intact.

*“A good consensus agreement means that everyone can save face. There is enough of something for everybody so that they can happily go home and justify it to their bosses.”*

Part of this has to do with procedural fairness. Even if a party is disappointed by the outcome, they should feel they had a real opportunity to present their views. Giving parties a sense of participation and voice is part of your job, and it underpins the legitimacy of consensus.

It sounds strange, but achieving maximum pride entails sticking to the speed limit. You can't move too fast if your goal is to bring everyone across the finish line. People need sufficient time to perform their due diligence, demonstrate they've defended their position, and fully comprehend the landscape before they can commit.

*“There is a need to be managed through to the landing zone where nobody feels like they let go too soon, or that they didn't get everything that they wanted, or someone else got more.”*

You've probably heard consensus described as that sweet spot where everyone is equally unhappy. While there's truth in this framing, it oversimplifies your complex task. Burdens are rarely distributed equally, and concessions are seldom shared proportionately. Rather than aiming for shared discontent, consider it your baseline. It's the necessary price of collective forward movement.

*“I have yet to encounter a situation where negotiators have said, ‘Wow, we love this text. You did an amazing job.’ That never happens... and I think it's part of the storyline. They have to be unhappy with the text, and then you listen to the underlying messages that come after the extreme voices of unhappiness.”*

You can see consensus as less about shared pain, and more about shared understanding and commitment. You're not merely building agreement, you're building group capacity to find solutions that will drive massive societal change. If that sounds like a daunting task, that's because it is. Success doesn't always look like a final text, sometimes it looks like people sticking with the process.

*“Even if we didn't manage to get a decision but everyone is still talking, that means I did not create dissent whilst facilitating. That is my definition of success.”*

*“One of the first things I heard as a facilitator is that everyone is supposed to be equally unhappy, but I think the best rooms are those in which there is a common understanding of where we are at this point in time.”*

Ultimately, consensus is not the sum of individual items, but the overall deal on the table. Sometimes parties will agree to give in on some of their demands because getting results elsewhere was more important for them in the end.

*“Even if we had different opinions, we had the same level of understanding that sometimes I have to take a few steps forward or a few steps back, and sometimes you have to do it. But in general, we are striving for the result that would define us as a group.”*

The strongest consensus decisions grow from a fundamental agreement among parties that collaborative work is essential. You foster this by setting clear expectations about your shared task and continually reinforcing the underlying purpose that brings you together.

### Take-Aways

#### Honor face and dignity:

Consensus emerges when participants can maintain their integrity while compromising.

#### Pace the journey deliberately:

Allow sufficient time for positions to be fully articulated before moving toward solutions.

#### Build shared meaning:

True consensus reflects common understanding of both the problem and the path forward.

### Theory and Analysis

#### Face Negotiation Theory (Ting-Toomey)

In multicultural settings like the UNFCCC, participants bring different cultural orientations toward "face" (public self-image). Successful facilitators navigate these dynamics by creating processes that allow parties to maintain dignity while making necessary concessions.

#### Multi-partiality (Cobb, Rifkin)

Rather than seeking neutrality, multi-partiality involves a conscious effort to engage with all narratives in a conflict. This approach asks facilitators to actively hold space for multiple, and even competing, truths. This is a commitment to equitable visibility: ensuring that no voice is excluded from the conversation or the consensus.

# CONCLUSION

So there you have it, a tasting menu of tips, tricks and reflections to sustain you on your facilitation journey. Hopefully you'll carry some pieces to snack on the next time you're deep in a contact group, wondering why you ever agreed to facilitate in the first place.

Some of these ideas might feel familiar, and maybe you even found yourself thinking "Hey, I do that already!" This wouldn't be surprising, since every insight came directly from your friends and colleagues. You could think of this Handbook like a potluck: a shared buffet of practices, experiences, and generosity contributed by those whose names appear on the back page. Everyone brought their best dish, we just set the table.

You might notice that the Propositions don't follow the usual format of a handbook. They aren't rules, and they aren't checklists. They're invitations, ways of seeing, ways of showing up, ways of working with the unpredictable complexity of climate negotiations. They don't chart one clear path, they remind you that there are paths, and many of them. And you are allowed - indeed, encouraged - to take a new turn when needed.

By writing this knowledge into a Handbook, the goal is to bring greater attention to the mindsets, attitudes and behaviours of effective facilitators. By creating attention, the aim is to encourage a culture of facilitation that strengthens the capacity of the UNFCCC to deliver more ambitious, lasting climate agreements.

At this time, this is what the process asks: more people - like you - bringing clarity, creativity, and a bit of calm to the chaos.

Bon voyage.

## Quick Guide of Propositions

### 1: Take your space

Claim your own permission space beyond the formal rulebook. By establishing your presence and approach, you'll create conditions for genuine engagement and consensus-building rather than simply moderating.

### 2: Gain perspective

Understand the broader context in which your negotiations exist. By recognizing interconnections between different sessions, topics, and moods, you can navigate challenges more strategically and help negotiators move past sticking points.

### 3: Make friends

Build relationships outside formal proceedings to create trust networks that enable honest communication and flexible problem-solving. These connections provide insights that formal documents cannot and can help parties find creative solutions when positions seem immovable.

### 4: Humor us!

Use humor to transform high-pressure negotiations by relieving tension, resetting energy, and building group cohesion. Well-placed levity signals confidence, creates safety, and provides much-needed perspective during intense discussions.

### 5: Listen, listen, listen

Effective listening involves understanding the complete narrative, recognizing unspoken elements, and tracking subtle shifts in position. By developing different listening skills, facilitators can anticipate roadblocks, sense emerging movement, and identify consensus opportunities.

### 6: Bend the rules

While Rules and Procedures create essential structure and legitimacy, knowing when and how to flexibly apply them is key to overcoming impasses. Skilled facilitators understand that rules serve the process - not the other way around - and can navigate creatively within boundaries while maintaining trust.

### 7: Emotions ain't all bad

Emotions can be valuable signals that highlight core concerns and drive momentum when properly channeled. By supporting respectful emotional expression and modeling emotional regulation, facilitators can transform tension into connection and drive momentum toward solutions.

### 8: The ingredients of consensus

True consensus requires managing not just substantive issues but also timing, expectations, and participants' need to maintain dignity. Successful facilitators understand that consensus emerges when everyone feels heard and can return home with their professional integrity intact.

## About the author

Julien Thomas is an artistic researcher, designer and consultant based in the Netherlands. He researches the attitudes, assumptions and emotive qualities of climate science and politics. He has worked with climate-oriented scientists and civil servants to develop installations, objects, texts, and websites that aid in the anticipation of sustainable future climates. Past collaborators include the Urban Futures Studio (Utrecht University), PBL, KNMI, and various Dutch research institutions. ([www.julienfthomas.com](http://www.julienfthomas.com))

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Last note:

As a working document, this book improves through feedback. If you would like to contribute to a next iteration, please contact [julienfthomas@gmail.com](mailto:julienfthomas@gmail.com)