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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Closing Moves: How Facilitators Discursively Address Challenges in a Convergent Phase of Public Meetings

Maria Sjögren

Facilitators of public meetings face the complex task of guiding participants through tensional phases of divergent discussions and convergent decision-making conversations. Their task becomes particularly demanding in the convergent phase, when participants have crucial opportunities to influence the meeting's outcome, yet a structured communicative focus is required. This study analyzes how challenges for facilitators are discursively manifested during the convergent phase of public meetings and through which communicative moves these are addressed. The analysis identifies three recurring challenges for facilitators: topical detours, lack of concretization when formulating suggestions, and uncertainties about ownership of the process. The study contributes to research on facilitation in public meetings by providing empirical insights into the recurring challenges and communicative moves that emerge as facilitators lead meetings to closure, shedding light on the communicative norms and expectations on participants that guide interaction in the crucial convergent phase.

Keywords: public meetings; facilitation; discourse; moves; participation

Introduction

Facilitator 1:

> My role today in this group is to help you (.) get everyone to speak
> (...) and what we will do together at the end today is that we together will
> think of all the things we have talked about what is the most important (...) that
> can turn into suggestions later so that we take a step ahead and become a bi:t more concrete (...) ehm I also want to say that it is okay to think differently in the group (...)
>
> Extract 1, from discussion 1 on parenthood (see Case and Material)

Extract 1 is taken from a public meeting held by a municipal city district in a suburb in Sweden in 2017. The meeting was part of a participatory process aimed at generating ideas on how to reduce violence against children. The extract illustrates how the facilitator introduces an inherently tensional task for facilitators in public meetings: to open the floor for diverging views, while simultaneously leading the participants to narrow their discussions and reach a mutual consensus (Blong 2012; Moore 2012; Pearce et al. 2009). This paper analyzes how challenges for facilitators are discursively manifested in the convergent phases of public meetings and what actions the facilitators deploy to address these challenges.

Public meetings are a common method for public participation in which citizens are invited by public institutions to discuss pressing issues with public officials or politicians (Leighter & Castor 2009; McComas 2010). This paper departs from the fact that public meetings, while sites for explorative conversation, also aim to generate ideas and decisions around a specific theme and that there are different communicative norms for the divergent and convergent phases of public meetings (Black & Wiederhold 2014; Escobar 2019; Pearce et al. 2009). The facilitators' main task is to provide communicative structure and ensure participation while guiding the meeting toward closure. This task becomes especially demanding in the convergent phase, as the communicative focus narrows toward decision-making. Previous research shows that facilitators often risk becoming too dominant in this phase, as they are keen to lead the meetings to their intended end (Black & Wiederhold 2014; Moore 2012). This can discourage participation and underscores the importance of studying the challenges and actions of the facilitators during convergent phases in public meetings.

This study focuses on public meetings that were part of the participatory process briefly introduced above. The aim is to analyze how challenges for facilitators are manifested discursively during the convergent phase in these public meetings and which conversational moves (Blong 2012; Dillard 2013; Goffman 1981) the facilitators deploy to address the challenges and accomplish the situated goals of the discussions. The paper provides a

Department of Journalism, Media and Communication, University of Gothenburg, Sweden

maria.sjogren@jmg.gu.se

nuanced and empirical understanding of the discursive patterns that this task manifests in and through which moves these meetings come to a closure.

Facilitation in Public Meetings

As a result of a growing body of research on deliberative, participatory, and public dialogue events, there are many definitions of these and related concepts such as citizen assemblies and mini-publics. Here, I deploy the term 'public meetings' as a general term to denote gatherings within the public realm in which citizens are invited to discuss topical issues with politicians and public officials. In line with McComas et al. (2010), I regard them as speech events with certain ideals, actors, and activities taking place in a distinct order.

Generally, they are imbued with normative aims that are rooted in longstanding traditions of democracy, deliberation, and dialogue, as well as in ideals of an engaged citizenry (Farkas 2013; Mansbridge et al. 2006; Sprain & Ivancic 2017). Leaning on Carcasson and Sprain (2016: 45), a broad definition of deliberation is 'groups of individuals engaging in an inclusive, respectful, and reasoned consideration of information, views, experiences, and ideas'. The related concept of dialogue refers to a specific way of communicating that focuses on 'multivocality, open-endedness, human connection, and the co-creation of meaning' (Black 2008: 94). Public meetings often bear traces of these communicative ideals. While processes of invited participation, including public meetings, have different designs, the initiating institution tends to start by planning before the event and to continue afterwards with follow-up activities and implementation work (Cooper & Smith 2012; McComas 2001). Moreover, and of relevance for this study, the events themselves typically have an opening or divergent phase, when views upon a topic are broadened and various perspectives on the salient issues are solicited, and a closing or convergent phase, in which consensus is reached or decisions are taken (Ångman 2013; Black & Wiederhold 2014; Escobar 2019). This implies that dialogic and deliberative qualities are symptomatic in an explorative phase where different ideas can flourish (Sprain & Ivancic 2017), while the closing phase requires a different communicative focus targeted around what is to be decided and possible limitations in relation to that. In the words of Pearce et al. (2009: 261), 'an event that occurs in the context of "hearing all the voices" or "eliciting different views" will have a less structured format than an event that is designed to produce a specific decision'. A successful public meeting thus needs to promote a participatory communicative climate during two quite distinct phases. For the facilitators that guide the participants through the different phases, this becomes a central communicative challenge.

As public meetings increase, the field of professional facilitators has also grown (Escobar 2019). It is generally concluded that skilled facilitation requires training and experience (Escobar 2019; Sandfort & Quick 2017). Studies analyzing the actions of facilitators provide insights into the many resources deployed by them in public meetings, seeing how they shape, enable, or constrain talk (Ångman 2013; Dillard 2013; Myers 2007; Ryfe 2006; Sandfort & Quick 2017). Facilitators' actions are conclusively considered to be central to the success of a public meeting. Carcasson and Sprain (2016: 56) propose that '[a]ctive facilitators (…) are often critical to turning the event from a collection of individual opinions to an interactive experience where the hard work of listening, mutual understanding, and collaboration is more likely to occur.' However, their important work also places them in a privileged position that could potentially lead to dominance. As outlined, facilitators need to navigate through the conflictual ideals of divergent and convergent phases. Pearce et al. (2009) label facilitators as 'chaos theorists' to be able to shape a dialogic environment while keeping track of time and process (2009: 620). Similarly, Moore (2012) describes the communicative task for facilitators as needing to follow from the front, referring to how deliberative ideals lean on the understanding that fruitful discussions should emerge among the participants without coercion while, in fact, the facilitators are the central actors enabling such discourse. This communicative challenge comes to a head at the end of a meeting. As Moore (2012: 155) formulates it, 'the paradox of actively conducting a deliberation such that it seems to emerge naturally is nowhere more acutely felt than at those moments when deliberation comes to a conclusion.' Moore (2012) outlines two risks during the convergent phase, which are echoed by other studies, the first being that facilitators could be tempted to guide the participants too quickly to a conclusion. Black and Wiederhold (2014) similarly conclude that facilitators tend to guide participants toward closing the discussion, although not all opinions have been aired, when the focus of the facilitators is related to the organizational goals and planning ahead. The authors suggest that 'explicit awareness that facilitators and group members do not share the same understanding of timing is important' (Black & Wiederhold 2014: 302). The second risk is that a wish to reach closure can result in too easily accepting silence as consensus. There is simply no easy way to detect whether silence implies consensus or whether it is a result of 'desirable social pressure' (Moore 2012: 158). This is also suggested in a study by Ångman (2013: 244), who finds that closures in public meetings are often introduced as part of face-preservation strategies for both participants and facilitators 'to avoid conflict, anger and embarrassment'. However, closures lead to the discontinuation of deepened dialogue. As the facilitators often have both significant knowledge of the issue at hand and processual knowledge of the communicative format, it can be particularly difficult to object to their interpretations or suggested conclusions (Black & Wiederhold 2014; Farkas 2013).

In sum, facilitators must navigate this tension of guiding the participants through a process with certain communicative qualities while progressing in any expected processual outcomes, without dominating the discussion. This task is also illustrated in the introductory quotation (Extract 1), in which the facilitator highlights the need both to include everyone's voice and to reach consensus. This paper analyzes by which conversational moves facilitators address challenges in a closing phase of public meetings to accomplish the anticipated aims of the meetings.

The Case and Material

The analyzed meetings took place in 2017 and were part of a public participation process named 'Life without Violence', initiated by a Swedish municipal district. The process ran from 2016 to 2018, and I observed it throughout. A core working group of three (female) civil servants led the process. The overall aim of the process was to minimize violence for children in the area and bring forth ideas on how to reduce it. What constituted violence was left for participants to define, though a general understanding referred to the continuing occurrence of violent incidents in this suburb.

The participatory method deployed was developed by a national network for dialogue in complex societal topics, which was hosted by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR), an employers' organization for all Swedish municipalities and regions (see Hellquist & Westin 2019). The method builds upon a process design that includes the steps of preparation within the municipality, participatory activities, and implementation work. The participatory activities consist of interviews and public meetings; the latter are in focus of this paper. Firstly, the civil servants interviewed around 80 persons (citizens, public officials, politicians, and civil society) to gather perspectives on the chosen topic. From the interviews, through internal workshops, the civil servants aggregated 15 recurring themes (e.g., parenthood, education, and gender roles). Thereafter, they invited all interviewees to the final stage of the process—five public meetings, designed to discuss the themes and generate concrete ideas to reduce violence.

The meetings and their purpose

The meetings were facilitated by the working group of civil servants. There were approximately 50 participants at each meeting, which lasted around 2.5 hours. Most participants had been interviewed earlier and included local residents as well as politicians, civil servants, police, and other stakeholders. Because many people spoke languages other than Swedish as their mother tongue, interpreters were present. During the first meeting, five topics relating to the overarching theme of violence (from the 15 themes outlined by the civil servants) were decided upon for further discussion. During meetings 2–4, the participants discussed these themes in groups. On each occasion, the civil servants introduced the goals and timeline of the process and thereafter participated as facilitators in the group discussions. They were all experienced facilitators.

Meetings 3 and 4, where I collected the data, focused on developing concrete themes and suggestions. The suggestions were intended to address the issue of violence in a long-term way and were to be formulated as relevant, meaningful, and doable. To write down their suggestions, the groups were given papers with guideline headings of 'what', 'when', 'who', and 'how'. During the fifth meeting, the groups primarily engaged in discussions without facilitation; therefore, this meeting will not be the focus of this study.

The communicative ideals of this method for dialogue in complex societal topics were to promote a dialogic environment that was open to many and conflicting perspectives (Hellquist & Westin 2019). However, as described, alongside these communicative ideals, the meetings also aimed to generate concrete ideas for reducing violence. In meetings 3 and 4, when this objective was made explicit, the facilitators' task became to guide participants in formulating themes and proposals. As follows, the communicative challenge for the facilitators here is how to guide the participants from broad discussions on a complex topic to formulating concrete suggestions under certain headlines.

Analytical Framework

The concept of moves

To analyze how facilitation challenges in the meetings are discursively manifested and addressed, I deploy the concept of moves, relying on Blong (2012), Dillard (2013), and Goffman (1981). Initially, Goffman (1981) outlined moves as a category for analyzing interaction. Moves have been adopted to the context of facilitation of dialogic events by Blong (2012) and further used by Dillard (2013). Goffman (1981: 24) describes moves as an intentionally vague concept 'whose definition I cannot and want not to fix very closely'; however, moves refer to 'any full stretch of talk or of its substitutes which has a distinctive unitary bearing on some set or other of the circumstances in which participants find themselves'. In other words, according to Goffman, moves are verbal or non-verbal actions, large or small, that in some way affect the frame of the communicative situation. Depending on the context, the same actions can alter situations differently. In the setting of public dialogue events, Blong (2012: 41) defines moves as:

> large chunk answers to the question: What is the facilitator doing? Moves are identifiable actions, but like all communication forms they are fluid, integrated, patterned, and co-constructed. They are not discrete entities, but blend and have fuzzy boundaries.

Blong thus sees moves as facilitators' actions. Like Goffman, she highlights the complexity of defining moves, as these 'chunks' of communication are part of multilayered situations. From those descriptions, I define moves as actions that aim to regulate, alter, or sustain the communicative frame and the participant framework. 'Frame' and 'participant framework' refer to Goffman's central idea that in any given situation, interlocutors try to align to each other based on their definition of the situation (the frame) and that the roles that participants take up in the interaction together form the 'participation framework' (1981). A move can be one turn, but the same (or different) actions can also be pursued as the same move over several turns. Thus, the facilitators' moves indicate the frame, i.e., communicative norms and expectations, for the participants to align to, which continuously redefines what it entails to be a participant in different stages of the meetings. In public meetings, these moves are progressive because they guide participants from the initial discussions all the way to the writing of proposals.

The different moves

Below, I present the specific moves outlined by Blong (2012) and further used by Dillard (2013), which consist of presentation moves, elicitation moves, and interpretation moves.

Presentation moves occur as the facilitators speak and the participants listen—for instance, as meta talk when they talk about the process or introduce coming activities. These moves often take place at the beginning and provide a frame to the meeting.

Elicitation moves are actions, commonly questions, deployed by facilitators to gain further information or opinions in relation to specific utterances. These moves can widen discussions or be formulated as clarifications and specifications. Questions always guide the participants by including expectations on how and what to answer.

Interpretation moves are commonly combined with other moves (Blong 2012) and refer to actions when the facilitators provide interpretations of the participants' discussions, for instance, to clarify statements or to summarize and relate discussions to the meeting agenda.

Moves derived from the material

During the coding of the meetings in the convergent phase, I recurrently came across actions that did not fall into the above categories. These moves, which are empirically induced from the material, have been coded under the headings of frame-shifting moves and practical moves.

Frame shifting moves, which can be compared to framing talk (see Blong 2012), refer to interruptive actions that punctuate an ongoing discussion specifically to reframe or alter the focus of it.

Practical moves are actions by the facilitators formulated as prompts to the participants specifically to take on practical tasks, thus introducing a role other than merely listening and talking. While in other contexts this could include other actions, the practical moves here specifically call on the participants to write things down.

Data and Methodology

Data and consent

Data for the study consist of transcribed tape recordings of the group discussions that took place at the five public meetings, focusing on meetings 3 and 4.

To record, at each of these meetings, I introduced myself and the research project and provided written information about it. I asked verbally for consent to be recorded and made it clear that they could withdraw at any time. Anonymity could be guaranteed for all the participants. However, the civil servants were aware and consenting that complete anonymity for them could not be guaranteed for a well-informed reader. No sensitive data has appeared or been included.

During these meetings (3 and 4), eight parallel discussions on different themes, approximately one hour long, took place. To illustrate the forthcoming results section, excerpts are chosen from four discussions by two of the facilitators, themed around schools and parenthood (named *Schools* 1 and 2 and *Parenthood* 1 and 2). These are chosen to highlight that, despite variance in facilitator styles, the discourse patterns are similar. In terms of transcriptions, they have been kept basic, as the interest here lies in analyzing moves, which often take place over several turns. I have translated them from Swedish into English as verbatim as possible, including false starts and repetitions, and, when distinctive, prosody and intonation are included. I have sometimes corrected faulty grammar for readability purposes but, otherwise, kept them close to the Swedish original. The transcription key is included as an appendix and is developed by conventions in Myers (2007) and Silverman (2020).

Analytical steps

I have had an abductive analytic approach, making use of my case-specific knowledge of the process by moving iteratively between the theoretical framework and empirical observations in the material (Silverman 2020).

As a first step, based in the analytical framework of moves, I used the software program NVivo to code all moves throughout the five meetings. At this stage I was paying attention to how the facilitators' actions guided the participants regarding what ought to be going on and how they framed the communicative situation. Through this, I got a broad understanding of the facilitators' undertakings throughout these meetings, including the differences between the initial (divergent) and latter (convergent) meetings. Logically, this coding revealed other types of moves in the end than in the beginning. Departing from this, I focused closely on the facilitators' moves in meetings 3 and 4, which constitute the convergent phase of the process. By paying attention to the facilitators' actions that progressively guided the participants towards generating concrete suggestions, I expanded the analytical framework to incorporate frame shifting and practical moves as these actions changed the communicative frames and introduced a new type of participant role, apart from speaker/listener and questioner/responder.

Lastly, I analyzed which challenges these moves recurrently addressed. To elaborate, based on both previous research and empirical observations, it was expected that there would be challenges connected to this phase. Accordingly, by analyzing the moves the facilitators frequently deployed in the meetings, the analysis revealed what they repeatedly sought to address and accomplish, i.e., what facilitation challenges they had and how they were manifested discursively. The analysis disclosed three patterns of challenges and moves as specific for the convergent phase, which are presented below.

Results

Three challenges stood out as specific for the facilitators in these meetings. They are all related to how the facilitators guide the participants to talk about and formulate suggestions in certain ways. As is shown, they appear both chronologically and along a trajectory of increasing concretization as the meeting progresses. These challenges—topical detours, lack of concretization, and ownership of the process—structure the results section. Each section explains how the challenges relate to the convergent phase of the meetings, detailing the moves used by the facilitators to address these challenges and the design of those moves.

Topical detours

The first communicative challenge that the facilitators persistently address in these meetings is how to keep the discussion focused on formulating concrete ideas. The topical focus is continuously regulated by frame-shifting moves. Symptomatic of these is that they interrupt the conversation and call attention to the agenda for the discussion, stressing the time and pointing to the need for production (of concrete ideas). In a divergent phase where conversations ideally are characterized by openness and exploration (Sprain & Ivancic 2017), there is less need for facilitators to adjust the topical focus. In this closing phase of the meeting, however, frame-shifting moves are repeatedly deployed. As shown in the following two extracts, these interruptive moves range from deferential to more direct in tone, but they are both formulated as open questions that mirror the overarching purpose of the discussion. These questions are challenging to answer, which explains why the frame shifts are not always successful.

Extract 2: Parenthood 1 (FC1 = Female Citizen 1, F1 = Facilitator, FC2 = Female Citizen 2)

Extract 2 illustrates a frame-shifting move aimed to regulate the topical agenda. It is gathered from the end of the third meeting when the need to reach consensus becomes particularly apparent.

1 FC1	Yes exactly but unfortunately it is not like that
2	it is us that need to raise our children=
3 F1	=And what needs (…) to change (…)? What do we need to do
4	for that to happen? So if we should try this last moment and be a bit more
5	like (.) okay now we say information again (…) like how should we
6	reach a change here? What should we do together to change this?
7 FC2	No but I am think- I reacted to what [NAME] said

The frame-shifting move here is seen as Facilitator 1 interrupts a discussion about raising children by quickly taking the floor and asking what needs to be changed for this to happen, which is a question that here only vaguely refers to the conversational context (lines 3–4). In control of the floor, F1 resets the agenda by recalling the time left and the purpose of the discussion. This interruption is followed by an elicitation move, as F1 asks, 'What should we do (…)?' (line 6). Although the frame shift is interruptive, the turn of F1 is formulated with deferential language and in an optional way—'if we should try (…)'—which mitigates the interruption. The 'we' also highlights this as a collective effort. However, the question is formulated in an abstract way ('how', 'what') and the open call to address this 'change' is not responded to. Instead, the next participant acknowledges it by saying, 'No but (…)', and then continues the ongoing discussion.

Extract 3: Schools 1 (MC = Male Citizen 1, MC2 = Male Citizen 2, F2 = Facilitator 2, MB = Male Boss, FC = Female Citizen, FB = Female Boss)

Extract 3 illustrates a frame-shifting move, which is more sharply formulated, and as a contrast to extract 2, the participants align to the new frame.

1 MC	Then the rules won't help anyway
2	that is what its- is about to have
3	the communication between the parents=
4	=[overlapping talk]=
5 MC2	=But how should we do with the rules if-=
6 F2	=Now now now I have to be a bit of a facilitator
7	and organize this a bit because time flies and this is
8	supposed to be like tied together a bit
9 MB	Now you have to organize this a bit .hhhh
10 F2	Ah because the clock ticks and this should be like pack-
11	it should be formulated a bit so (…) is it something you think that this
12	we have talked about? This is a good start for an idea or a thought?
13 FC	We started with community
14 F2	Yes: but community was that an idea or a suggestion?
15 FB	Yes but this (…) with parental group

The extract starts with a participant talking in a general way about 'rules' and the need for communication. This is interrupted by Facilitator 2, who first overlaps his turn and then raises her voice to take the floor, saying, 'Now now now (…)'. She refers to her role as a facilitator and the need to 'organize this a bit' (lines 6–7), thus implying that the group is not aligned to the purpose of the discussion now. As in the previous extract, F2 refers to the limited time they have left (lines 7, 10) and points to the expected outcome of this discussion by saying that this conversation is 'supposed to' be 'tied together a bit' (line 8). These meta-comments about what 'should' be done highlight the focus of production in this phase, as well as the norms for the facilitator as the organizer and the participants as discussants. This explicit frame shift could be considered a rather harsh formulation, and a boss (line 9) jokingly repeats her turn, interpreted here as an attempt to mitigate it. However, F2 repeats her message of the need to refocus the communication activity (lines 10–11). Her frame-shifting move ends with an open question to the participants to formulate ideas (line 12). Here, this is responded to by a woman who recalls what they started to talk about: 'We started with

community' (line 13). F2 asks a polar question, that is, with two distinct alternatives, to further specify this (line 14). The discussion then continues, aligned to the task of formulating ideas, as another boss suggests parental groups (line 15) as an answer to the question posed by F2. This request for more concretization by F2 is tied to the next facilitation challenge, addressing *how* they discuss suggestions.

Lack of concretization

The second facilitation challenge relates to how the facilitators seek to guide the participants to concretize and formulate the suggestions according to the pre-set criteria of this participatory method (relevant, meaningful, and doable; see description in Case and Material). The challenge of how to formulate concrete suggestions is invoked both by the facilitators, through actions that imply that the discussions/suggestions are not concrete enough, and by the participants, through explicit questions about the task. To direct the participants, the facilitators deploy elicitation moves aimed at bringing forth more detailed ideas from the ongoing talk. In this case, the elicitation moves aim to elicit specific responses rather than broaden the discussion. The questions are often preceded by prefatory statements that present or aim to explain the ongoing talk and activity. However, the following two extracts demonstrate that the moves for eliciting concrete responses, despite persistent pursuit over several turns, are not successful here. In line with observations in other studies, this points out that to formulate the suggestions in the asked-for way and to participate beneficially in the convergent phase here, specific communicative competence is required (Moore 2012; Sprain & Reinig 2018).

Extract 4: Parenthood 1 (F1 = Facilitator 1, P = Participants, FC = Female Citizen, FCS1 = Female Civil Servant 1, FCS2 = Female Civil Servant 2)

In extract 4, the challenge of concretization is illustrated, as Facilitator 1 pursues eliciting questions that indicate that the participants' contributions are not sufficiently concrete.

1	F1	When I have listened (...) I think that you
2		talk a lot about information [mm aah]
3		(...) and then I think about what you said when you said that we
4		should have a parental education eh and (...)
5		then I think eh what does it need to contain to be something
6		that one wants to attend being a parent?
7		(...) Like what needs- eh what does it
8		need to be about? °What should it be about?°
9	FC	All important points I think
10	F1	What are important points?
11	FC	Yes ((laughter))=(...)
12	FCS1	Rights and obligations and obligations and rights
13	FC	=All the important points that ((laughter))=
14	FCS1	=Wha- what parental education is it that you want to run?
15	FSC2	Well that is something I got to create at [NAME] (...)
16		and then there are the core values also which are very important (...)
17	F1	What does that mean?
18	FSC2	The core values?

The extract starts with an interpretation move by Facilitator 1 in which she clarifies which themes she has picked up on ('when I have listened'). Specifically, F1 connects an abstract discussion about 'information' to a previously discussed idea about parental education and suggests that the need for information could be incorporated into this suggestion of parental education (lines 1–8). Thus, she tries to move a general theme into something more concrete. This interpretation is then paired with an elicitation move: '(...) what does it need to be about?' A woman (FC) answers the question by saying, 'All important points I think' (line 9). F1 indicates that this is still too abstract and asks, 'What are important points?' (line 10). This, however, is still an abstract wh- question, and the laughter from FC along with her answer (lines 11, 13) and the laughing response by FCS1 (line 12), in which they repeat these abstract notions, suggest that it is still difficult to answer this question.

However, during these eliciting questions, Facilitator 1 receives help from a participant, also a civil servant, who asks a similar question: 'What parental education is it that you want to run?' (line 14). Another civil servant participant then answers (lines 15–16) and refers to a parental education that she has organized previously, highlighting the importance of 'core values.' Facilitator 1 catches on to this but, again, elicits more specificity by asking, 'What does that mean?' The pursuit of these questions directed at the participants, FC and FCS2, thus aims to guide them to formulate the abstract notion of 'important points' for parental education more concretely to become an implementable suggestion. However, as the extract illustrates, the guiding questions are open and remain difficult to answer.

Extract 5: Schools 2 (MP = Male Participant, F2 = Facilitator 2, FP = Female Participant, P = Participants around the table)

In extract 5, the challenge of formulating concrete suggestions is invoked by a participant who lacks clarity about this communicative activity. To address his uncertainty, Facilitator 2 presents explicit information combined with elicitation moves.

1 MP	Should one work like in a group or should one
2	answer one by one or like how did you think?=
3 F2	=>Then I take this again<in a little while we should have
4	written something about each suggestion [each suggestion aha]
5	then we gather again and look at the suggestions together
6	then it can be like (...)<clear information if one thinks
7	that is a real important thing to discuss further>
8	when you have written (.) exactly how to formulate that
9	then one can go to that group
10 FP	That the school gives clear information to the parents?
11 F2	Yeah yea::h it can be that clearer information is needed (2)
12	eh now I have to check<have you (3) do you know>
13	how we should do this? Have you understood?=
14 P	=Yes yes concrete
15 F2	Concrete ah and then (...) you described what you meant
16	with complimenting>and then I misunderstood you cause
17	I thought that you meant that it was important that the school encouraged
18	the pupils but you said something else <right? Cause what did you say?
19 FP	Eeuhm I said that the parents have to tell the children
20 F2	Yeah so how can- how should one how do you think one can
21	formulate that? (3) Do you understand?
22 P	[Humming yes] ((but the discussion continues))

Extract 5 is taken from the beginning of the fourth meeting, just after Facilitator 2 has introduced the aim of the discussion, which is to transform broad topics from previous discussions into concrete suggestions. It starts with a participant asking whether this should be done groupwise or individually (lines 1–2), thus expressing uncertainty about the forthcoming task. F2 addresses his question over several turns by deploying elicitation moves, paired with presentation moves that include explicit information. As a first answer, F2 starts with a meta-preface before the coming presentation move and says, 'Then I take this again' (line 3). Then she presents concrete information that aims to reset the agenda and context, exemplifying what can happen in the discussion ahead: 'Then it can be like this that (...)' (lines 6–9). This presentation move is followed by a reassuring question to confirm that they have understood and are aligned to the activity now (lines 12–13). The participants answer, 'Yes yes concrete', which signals an understanding that concretization is an important focus now. Following this, Facilitator 2 directs an elicitation move to a participant that spoke before the extract starts (lines 15–18). This move, again, consists of explicit information and a question. Here, the preface to the question is formulated as a candidate answer in lines 17–18 (Pomerantz 1988), which is used to assist the participant by exemplifying what an allowable contribution in this context could be. The prefatory statement ends with the question, 'But you said something else right? Cause what did you say?', which encourages the participant to express something similar in her own words. However, as the participant answers (line 19), Facilitator 2 implies that this is still not what she is after and asks again, '(...) how do you think one can formulate that? Do you understand?' (lines 20–21), which would indicate that the participant has not understood how to formulate suggestions. Several participants hum 'yes' to this, but the discussion is then continued in a general way (not included). Here, as the uncertainty of formulation is invoked by the participants, they explicitly express that this is an unfamiliar activity. The extract illustrates how F2 tries to resolve this uncertainty over several turns by including clarification of the processual steps, reassuring questions, and illustrative suggestions to preface the eliciting questions. The extract thus highlights the differing knowledge of the facilitators and participants regarding this activity and its communicative format. This ties to the third challenge in this phase, regarding ownership of the formulations and the writing of proposals.

Ownership of the process (and the pen)

The third facilitation challenge consists of a dilemma between the participatory ideal of the participants as owners of the process and the need for production to adhere to the anticipated goals for the process, or, put simply, the actual writing of themes and suggestions. Logically, this challenge comes to the fore at the end of the discussions. The facilitators deploy different strategies to ensure that something is written down. Facilitator 1 deploys interpretation moves and polar questions, whilst Facilitator 2 uses practical moves as forthright prompts. This means that Facilitator 1, by interpreting the participants' discussions, conducts the writing herself, whereas Facilitator 2 instead urges the participants to write. The following two extracts highlight the emerging need for production and how the facilitators' moves put the discussions to paper. Regardless of strategy, the power inherent in the role of facilitator becomes visible here, as it is through these closing moves that the discussions result in written proposals.

Extract 6: Parenthood 1 (F1 = Facilitator 1, FB = Female Boss, MC = Male Citizen, P = Participants, PO = Police Officer) FC1 = Female Citizen 1

Extract 6 illustrates the frame shifting and interpretation moves through which Facilitator 1 summarizes and writes down themes at the end of the third meeting.

1	F1	You know what ((laughter))=
2		=[overlapping mumbling]=
3		time passes really quickly we need to look for those five things (…)
4		what when you think about what we have talked about (…) could
5		lead to a good suggestion? Can we help eachother to find that?
6	FB	Can I just go through a couple of numbers first this with language (.)
7		(…) I am really passionate about this (…)=
8	F1	=Does this mean that language is one of these important things?
9		((Indistinct overlapping chatter))
10	FB	Language is an important thing
11		((Chatter)) (…)
12	FC1	I am thinking we talked about engagement also (…) so when I think
13		about what you said about engagement how do I as a parent=
14	F1	=Is that also one of those things then engagement how do we
15		get the parents (…)? Is that also a theme that could be when
16		we continue looking for suggestions?
17	P	Mmm yeah
18	PO	I am a bit more radical I think that we should have a
19		parental education and there should be demands (…)
20		((Chatter and answers))
21	F1	DOES THIS MEAN that this is a third thing
22		parental education voluntarily or a must?
23	P	((Humming yes but continue to discuss))

Here, the initial frame-shifting move highlights the need for production (lines 1–3). This is interrupting in the same sense as in extracts 2–3, but here, it is aimed not merely to shift the topical focus to talk about themes and suggestions but to decide upon them and write them down. F1 stresses the time and the aim and concludes with the open question if they could do this together (lines 4–5). However, the participants are engaged in a lively discussion, and the following speaker, a boss, instead asks for permission to 'go through a couple of numbers first' (lines 6–7). F1 pursues her agenda of production and interprets this statement as a final theme by asking the polar question, 'Does this mean that language (…)?' (lines 8–9). The boss confirms briefly that language is important, but without explicitly stating that it is one of 'the five important things.' Instead, the discussion continues, and several persons try to speak at the same time (turns omitted). One participant returns to a previous theme and says to one of the others, 'So when I think about what you said about engagement' (lines 12–13). F1 rapidly interrupts this longer statement with another interpretation move formulated as a polar question: 'Is that also one of those things then engagement?' (line 14) and again stresses the goal of the discussion by asking, 'Is that also a theme (…)' (lines 15–16). The participants hum 'yes' to this. However, they are still engaged in their general discussion, and rather than exploring this, a police officer introduces a new topic of mandatory parental education. This statement receives quick responses (turns omitted), which Facilitator 1 again interrupts with another polar question: 'Does this mean that this is a third thing?' (lines 21–22), indicating that she has written down language and engagement and is now interpreting parental education as a third theme. Through these interpretation moves, she oversees the final formulations. The participants are invited to object but do not. They provide small affirmative responses but continue their general discussion.

Extract 7: Schools 2 (F2 = Facilitator 2, MC = Male Citizen)

Extract 7 instead shows how suggestions are put to paper through a practical move as Facilitator 2 encourages a participant to write down a suggestion.

1	F2	I just thought of a thing this that was in your proposal that was a
2		parental group and then it was this with mixed backgrounds
3		that could be written in that box there (…)
4	MC	Aha but not up here you mean?
5	F2	No because up there it only says parental group but what should be done
6		that could be written (.) you can write it there now
7	MC	Here here?
8	F2	Ah ah you can write mixed backgrounds there
9	MC	Here here?
10	F2	Ah ah then it has sort of gotten down a bit
11	MC	Mixed backgrounds [spelling out while writing]

They are here engaged in an activity in which F2 reads out previously outlined themes and asks the participants how

they can be transformed into suggestions. As the extract starts, they restart the conversation after an interruption. F2 takes the floor with a combined interpretation and practical move, saying, 'I just thought of (...)' and 'that could be written (...) (lines 1–3). Through this she reconnects to the activity with an interpretation move, specifying that the previously discussed idea parental group should include 'mixed backgrounds' and suggesting where on the paper this could be written. The participant (MC), however, seems not to grasp this instruction and asks, 'Aha but not up here you mean?' (line 4) while pointing to another box on the paper. F2 then clarifies the meaning of the boxes (lines 5–6) onto which the participant aligns with the practical move and writes down what F2 says while spelling it out loud. F2 interprets what is happening and says, 'Ah ah then it has sort of gotten down a bit' (line 10). Similar practical moves are repeated in this part of the discussion, which push the writing to the participants. In this particular case, though the participant writes, it is the facilitator who seems most eager for this to happen, and by suggesting what and where it should be written, she to some extent controls the content of the finalized suggestions.

Summary and Discussion

This paper has focused on how facilitators discursively address challenges in the convergent phase of public meetings. By analyzing facilitators' recurrent moves in group discussions, in which they guided participants to formulate suggestions for reducing violence against children in a Swedish suburb, three recurring challenges emerged: topical detours, lack of concretization when formulating ideas, and uncertainties about the ownership of the process. The analysis shows in empirical detail how these challenges and moves are manifested and reveals certain norms and expectations regarding what it entails to be a participant (and facilitator) in the convergent phase of public meetings. Firstly, the facilitators' repeated interruptions of a drifting topical focus indicate that the formulation of suggestions mattered more to them than to the participants. Other studies (Black & Wiederhold 2014; Moore 2012) also demonstrate the facilitators' stress about time and preoccupation with institutional aims. Further, the core task of formulating suggestions required in-depth guidance by the facilitators (see extracts 4 and 5). This suggests that it requires certain competence and/or knowledge to participate beneficially here, echoing what is found in other studies too, regarding the uneven distribution of knowledge among civil servants and citizens (Sprain & Reinig 2018). Finally, the facilitators placed special importance on putting words to paper, as demonstrated in extracts 6 and 7. From a participatory perspective, while the facilitators' interpretation moves (see extract 6) assumably aimed to help the group express their will, they also shaped the outcome, as participants rarely questioned these interpretations. Similarly, while the practical moves in extract 7 strengthen the position of the discussants, there is a fine balance between empowering their participation and dictating what should be written. Thus, just as in other studies (Ångman 2013; Black & Wiederhold 2014; Moore 2012), it is shown that facilitators have a prominent role in leading the meeting to its expected end.

Further, the empirical accounts presented illustrate how the facilitators negotiate their own roles and establish expectations for participants. For example, while the facilitators emphasize a collective 'we' (extracts 1 and 2, lines 4–8 in extract 5, and lines 3–6 in extract 6), they also step aside from this collective by leaving it to the group to formulate the suggestions and asking questions that specifically address the participants (e.g., lines 1–8 in extract 4 and lines 9–14 in extract 5). The facilitators also explicate their distinct role as mere facilitators (see extracts 1 and 3). However, although it is left to the participants to answer, the facilitators' position to indicate the design of answers is powerful. For example, the facilitators pressed for more specific responses over several turns (e.g., extract 4 and 5). In the end, when the participants did not actively adopt their role as producers, the facilitators did much of the writing/dictating. The patterns of challenges and moves outlined thus show in detail how norms and participant roles are negotiated in this convergent phase and through what moves words are being put to paper.

This study contributes to research on facilitation in public meetings by building on and extending the frameworks introduced by Blong (2012) and further developed by Dillard (2013). The study illustrates how the facilitators' task of bringing the meeting to closure comes about discursively. Although the specific activities in the convergent phase of public meetings may differ, they all involve a moment of closure when decisions are made or consensus is reached. Continued attention to this crucial phase is of importance for researchers and practitioners to further reveal how facilitators' communicative practices negotiate the tension between ensuring inclusion for the participants and also advancing the meetings to their intended endings.

Appendix

Translation Conventions

=	Indicates latched turns	><	Faster speech
[Over-lap]	Brackets indicate where an ongoing turn is overlapped and author's comments	Hhh	Laughter or laughter within words
-	Speaker breaks off a word	::	Colons indicate
(.)	Small pause		prolongation
(5)	Pause in seconds	?	Question intonation
<u>Yes</u>	Underline shows stressed syllable	WORD	Capitals, except first
° °	Quieter speech		letters, indicate
(...)	Omitted speech or turns		raised voice
(( ))	Descriptions by the author		

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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