

Idea jamming to limit climate change

By Jimmy Wan



Participants sharing their responses to a key question concerning climate change. Each participant had to pick one of six key questions they were interested in and move to one of six "colour zones" where that issue was discussed.

I had just started learning facilitation last year. So when I was called to be part of a volunteer team to help launch a climate-change related programme in July, I welcomed the opportunity to gain hands-on experience.

The programme is called CarbonCare Open Innovation Lab (Coil). Its mission is to foster innovation to tackle challenges posed by climate change. The first year of the project has three themes – climate mitigation, climate adaptation and resource conservation. Coil is also an attempt to create a multi-sector Open Innovation Community, the first in Hong Kong.

The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust, which funds Coil, had asked the International Association of Facilitators – Hong Kong (IAF-HK) to design an event to launch the programme. One of Coil's advisors, Mr Chong Chan-Yau, who is also a member of IAF-HK, wanted it to include an idea-jamming process as he believed this would be most in line with Coil's mission. More than 180 participants from business, NGOs and academic organisations were expected to attend.

A week before the event, IAF-HK president Lilian Wang conducted a briefing

and rehearsal session with the 14 volunteers. Mr Chong was also there to brief us on Coil's project background and relevant environmental issues.

As Lilian ran through the process, I saw how the consensus building approach and the ORID (Objective, Reflective, Interpretive, Decisional) dynamics of the Institute of Cultural Affairs had been adapted for the "InnoJam" session. I had learnt the ToP methodology in a Participatory Strategic Planning workshop conducted by Mr. Lawrence Philbrook of ICA Taiwan in March; so now I would get to practice the method in a real-life situation.

The launch was a four-hour event. We wanted to engage participants from the moment they registered! We used an ice-breaking activity - "Getting to know you BINGO Game". Participants interviewed each other about their consumption patterns as well as viewpoints on certain environmental issues. The first six participants to complete the interview would win a prize - a small plant. The room was soon filled with conversations and laughter.

After speeches by officiating guests, videos introducing the three themes on climate challenges were shown. After



each video, participants were asked to share their perspectives in groups of two or three, using questions based on the ORID framework. This was to prepare them to interact and express their views in the next session, the InnoJam brainstorming.

That session started with a “brain gym”. The facilitators held a roll of flip chart paper and used it to suggest different object such as a walking stick or a telescope. Participants had to guess what the facilitators meant. The roll was passed around so everyone got a chance to play!

The aim of the InnoJam session was to get participants to brainstorm ideas for new products or social innovation that would address the three themes of climate mitigation, adaptation and resource conservation. The hope was that participants would subsequently form teams around some of these ideas and involve people in their networks in the Coil project.

Six different colour zones, two for each of the three themes, were set up to deal with a specific question. Participants chose the question they were most interested in and formed a group. Each group had two facilitators to help them in their discussions.

Each group had a question that began the same way: “What innovative solutions can we, COIL members, develop to...” and ended with the following concerns:

- ...reduce embedded carbon in imported goods?
- ...improve energy efficiency in import and retail business?”
- ...maintain the productivity level as the heat goes up?
- ...improve the comfort level of the city living despite urban warming?
- ...change the meat consumption pattern to reduce the carbon footprint?
- ...conserve fishing resources via a seafood revolution at dining tables?

We had incorporated ICA’s consensus building method into the process for two reasons:

First, the participants were from diverse backgrounds: some were experts in the field, others had joined out of personal interest or to represent their company at large. We wanted everyone to contribute, not only the experts. The ICA process allowed this to happen through a three-stage approach that moved from individual reflections to sharing in small groups and then to consensus building in large groups.

Second, our client wished to inspire like-minded people to form project teams. In the consensus building process, participants group solutions of similar intent and then give the cluster a project name. This converging approach naturally brings people together and empowers them to form teams.

I saw how the structured InnoJam process provided a framework for discussion and facilitated a meaningful exchange of ideas. As a result, it quickly captured a group’s best thinking. The ideas were eventually connected together under various project names. More importantly, it was wonderful to see the participants experience positive, encouraging and collaborative group dynamics. Jockey Club said it believed participants found the Coil community insightful, reflective, stimulating and helpful.

The two-hour “InnoJam” session resulted in a large portfolio of innovative ideas. More than 40 projects ideas were uploaded to the Coil website. The event also demonstrated an open process for sustainability innovations. The Coil management team organised a thank-you lunch for the facilitators. They also discussed with IAF-HK about a follow up meeting and future collaboration.

Being a facilitator, where one has to be impartial where content is concerned and merely guide the group through the process, was a challenge for me as I have been playing a different kind of role as an in-house trainer for over ten years. I shall continue to learn and practise facilitation as I believe it is a useful approach to solve everyday issues.

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Top left: Ms Lilian Wang, President of IAF HK, leading participants in a brain gym during the COIL launch event in Hong Kong on July 4th this year. Accompanying her is Mr. Chong Chan Yau, an advisor of COIL and an IAF-HK member.

Right: Jimmy Wan (centre, back row) and the rest of the team of IAF-HK volunteers who facilitated the COIL launch event.

