

Tips for facilitating virtual Schwartz Rounds

Managing challenges

Not seeing the audience – listening rather than seeing (when/if they are off camera)

Schwartz Rounds facilitators report that there are a range of visual cues they use to try and understand what is going on in the Round. They will consciously and equally unconsciously see aspects of people's physical behaviour whilst they are contributing or waiting to contribute. These are clues about what is going on with that individual that may lead to an empathetic comment from the facilitator. In addition, the visually obtained data allows the facilitator to 'take the temperature' of the Round and make an intervention.

We suggest having only the two facilitators and two/three storytellers' faces showing during the first part of the session, when the stories are being told. We have arrived at this design because with potentially large number of faces, this can cause a sense of disquiet when the storytellers want a sense of stillness and attentiveness.

Once the stories have been told, the audience are invited to put their cameras on if they like. It may be that some still choose not to. We are mindful that facilitators may feel some concerns on not being able to see if someone in the audience is becoming distressed, as given the nature of this discussion, it would be difficult to know if someone is silently suffering. Under the 'Facilitator self-care and support' section of this document, there is a script that has some instruction on what members of the audience should do if they feel distressed.

Managing silence

While silence is a crucial part of the reflective process in Schwartz Rounds, we believe that in the context of online reflection you may feel this may not translate in the same way.

Some techniques you may use in stuck silences could include:

- Refer to the themes that came up in storyteller preparation. For example, "I was struck when we were preparing with Sunny that she used the phrase "when two worlds collide" and I was wondering how meaningful that felt and surely resonates hugely with everyone here in the room"
- Before the session starts, agree with your co-facilitator on a contingency story you can offer if the audience are reluctant to share. It may require some role-modelling from the facilitators to allow others to feel safer to offer reflections.
- You may want to note the silence. "I wonder if this silence shows that we are still very much processing what we are feeling. It's hard in these high-pressured times to even have time to identify our own emotional reactions...I am struck by the points in Sunny's story where she mentioned still coming to terms with her emotional state..."

Managing difficult emotions and feelings

It is important to remember that this is a voluntary forum, people are attending on the understanding that they are there to reflect on issues and emotions that may well be difficult. As the facilitator, you have to assume that people have chosen to attend because they can see a benefit in reflecting on

some of the difficulties they are confronting. Your role is to become aware of these emotions, sit with them, and allow them to be normalised by the group process.

To contain the forum and provide safe boundaries, we would recommend a number of safety measures be put in place:

- We recommend that you have a discussion with the storyteller in advance of talking about the story, in which you note that should a safe-guarding anxiety be raised relating to harm, you refer them on the formal organisational support services. Whilst we know this is unlikely, we feel this gives important assurance.
- When preparing the story, be mindful of the level of emotion displayed and consider how you think they will cope with telling the story.
- Remind everyone in the introduction that these virtual Schwartz Rounds are being run in difficult times and feelings may well be raw. Many of us have been thrown into a very different and uncertain world over the recent years – anxiety is a normal response to this huge sense of uncertainty - but we believe it is best not to feel isolated with these feelings; rather that we have the opportunity and share and normalise some of these emotions which can be hard to vocalise.
- Before the storytellers begin their stories, do go through some grounding techniques if that feels useful; mindful breathing and/or butterfly hugs have been used by some sites.

We invite you to reflect on these hypothetical scenarios:

- The mood in the session feels like it is spiralling into an overwhelming feeling of anxiety and despair
- What to do if one individual begins to become audibly distressed

Consider: Lifting the mood if it is becoming overly anxious. In our pilot virtual Round session, there were times when the discussion did become increasingly anxious, and the facilitator invited the group to take a large breath. This was then succeeded by the facilitator introducing a theme that came out of panel preparation about small acts of kindness. You may want to think about a phrase beforehand to bring in if this happens.

For example: “I am sensing that we are all feeling a lot of fear and anxiety about the uncertainty and the risks we are being faced at this current time. I wonder if this would be a good time to take a breath. I am grateful to feel connected in these feelings, I feel it is one of the things that is making the unbearable bearable. I wonder what others have noticed about these small acts that help with making the unbearable bearable?”

If one individual gets distressed, there is room to try and ensure that person feels able to stay and vocalise their feelings. In a similar way to a face-to-face Round, it is likely the next person volunteering to speak will offer validation and normalisation of these feelings to assist in helping this individual. However, in lieu of that, it is within your role to try and ease those feelings, to validate them.

For example: “Thank you for your bravery in verbalising the vulnerability you are feeling. I have no doubt that you are not alone in those feelings. I certainly resonate with what you have said. I hope you feel able to stay and listen to the following contributions. As is often the case with these forums being able to hear from others can ease some of the discomfort we are feeling. I wonder if anyone else has some reflections to offer on the theme of...”

Managing blame

In the context of the current climate, there may be a greater likelihood that tensions, anger, and feelings of discontent with colleagues are more likely to emerge. Furthermore, people may not have had a chance to fully identify their emotional state and thus may be rawer than anticipated.

It is good to have a think here about things you could do as facilitators if tensions or blame begins to dominate the discussion. What could you do if an individual begins to place blame on another in the session?

Consider: Taking ownership of your own feelings so people don't feel they are being singled out.

For example: "I know when I get stressed and am in a highly pressurised situation, I become myopic and find it difficult to be aware of the actions and values of others. I think we can all understand that emotion/behaviour. It is important to remember that this is a space where we do not blame or make judgements..."

At this point, it is important to move the discussion along – to sow another seed. "I was struck in the preparation meeting that we had by the reflections our storytellers offered regarding guilt. That we so often punish ourselves for not being good enough/ doing the best job, and that strikes me as a huge burden to carry. I wonder if anyone has any reflections on that. .. "

Managing problem solving

There may be a higher tendency towards problem solving as members will be so used to using their time to establish solutions to clinical/administrative problems. Remember to guide the discussion away. How could you manage a deviation to problem solving?

Consider: Reiterating the purpose of the space, or again taking ownership of all our needs to solve problems.

For example: "I noticed when I was hearing these two stories, I felt desperate to try and solve the problems, but it is important that we allow this time for reflection, what does it feel like to be so pressured to solve everything all the time..."

Debriefing the storytellers

To ensure that storytellers have not been adversely affected by the session, it is sensible to debrief them after the session. This may simply take the form of ten minutes after the session to check in and say how they think it went and how they are feeling now. You may want to offer them a separate meeting to debrief.

The aim of the debrief is to explore the experience for each storyteller, and ensure that if the experiences that they discussed and explored still feel raw, they know where in the organisation to go to talk this through.

In the substantial amount of feedback we have had to date, most storytellers find participating both interesting and rewarding, and often become a resource for Rounds, promoting them, attending future sessions and providing ideas for new topics and potential storytellers.

Facilitator self-care and support

Facilitating Rounds can require a level of responsibility and consideration that can lend itself to some emotional exhaustion after a session. It is important that you are able to establish some elements of self-care for yourself, your co-facilitator, and your storytellers. This may involve considering what you will do after you have run the Round. It may feel difficult to go head-first into work. Try and plan for some time after to relax and process.

Because there is an added element of uncertainty in facilitating this type of forum in the circumstances of the current pandemic, it adds another layer of pressure on the facilitator. This could lead to feelings of distraction – feeling like you are less able to concentrate on what is being said. Where possible, try and ensure that there is a division of responsibility here. If one facilitator is managing the muting and unmuting of participants, the other is keeping abreast of the discussion.

The reflections will likely often display a high level of anxiety, sadness, or distress. We found that introducing a breathing exercise or a Butterfly Hug was helpful to ensure people were able to manage these feelings. It also helped with establishing a feeling of community and togetherness, which attendees highly valued. We recommend either using these strategies as a matter of course, or bringing them in halfway through the session if it feels as if it is becoming overwhelmed with anxiety.

If you feel anxious about the discussion, please do not hesitate to contact your PoCF mentor. They are there as a support system for you.

Opening script for a virtual Schwartz Rounds

We suggest the opening script be shared between the two facilitators so that each makes their presence felt at the beginning of the session.

Facilitator 1

“Welcome to today’s virtual Schwartz Round. My name is and together with my colleague we will facilitate today’s session. Schwartz Rounds are a confidential forum where we can come together, both clinical and non-clinical staff, to reflect on the emotional and social impact of the work that we do. Having a chance to come together can help staff begin to feel less stress and less isolation, can help to build connection between individuals and teams and increase compassion, both for ourselves and each other. Research evidence shows that attending Schwartz Rounds can bring about the normalising of emotions; promote connectedness; change narratives; and create a culture of openness.

Via this online forum, we are aiming to provide support during the corona crisis in the form of a bounded reflective space. Our hope is that these sessions may run (state frequency) and will be open to all members of the organisation, clinical and non-clinical, to come together online for an hour to reflect on the emotional and social impact of our work. Our aim here is not to problem solve or think about what could have been done differently, but simply to step back and think about the experience of our work. This forum is confidential. So, while we want you to go away and discuss some of the themes that have come up and how you found the experience, please do so without identifying any individual staff members. (You may want to introduce the story of Kenneth Schwartz here)

This is a new and different kind of forum and we are mindful that there are some unusual challenges from participating in an online Round, and not being in the same physical location as other participants. We must also acknowledge that everyone’s thoughts and feelings are different to where they were previously, with our lives having been turned upside down by the crisis. We believe that

this is more reason for us all to engage with this forum and accept that emotions might be raw, but that the sharing of them can help. If you become distressed during the discussion but feel unable to contribute, please do send a private message to myself or my colleague [co-facilitator] so we can ensure you find some support. But we invite you all to feel able to contribute to the discussion and offer your reflections on what has resonated with you and any stories you would like to tell.

It is in part due to this time of heightened emotion that we recommend the routine use of simple grounding techniques. I would like us to practice them now for a few moments before the session begins.

The first is mindful breathing. Simply find a comfortable position and close your eyes. Take a moment and concentrate on the feeling of your breath on your nostrils as you breathe in then out. This will help to bring us to the now and help us sense areas of tension in our bodies associated with any strong feelings and emotions we are experiencing.

The second is the Butterfly Hug, which I'll demonstrate. Cross your hands across your chest, so your fingers are close to your collar bone. Each hand touches the opposite upper arm or shoulder. Then simply then move your hands like the wings of a butterfly, to tap your arms/shoulders in an alternating rhythm. Practice this alongside mindful breathing, to bring yourself to a sense of calm. Thank you – I would now like to pass over to my colleague (co-facilitator)".

Facilitator 2

"Two members of the team are going to kick off the session with a short story – which will relate to our theme for the Round today. We invite you to listen to the story with curiosity and once they have spoken we will open the session to you the participants to offer your own reflections and resonances on what you've heard. We, the facilitators, will keep an eye on the discussion and guide things back if needs be, to reflect on our emotions, rather than the specifics of the case.

In terms of housekeeping, please keep your microphone on mute and videos hidden whilst the storytellers are sharing their stories. When the discussion is opened up to the audience, please do turn your cameras back on. Please do stay for the full hour where possible. During the discussion, we will be managing contributions by asking you to raise your virtual hand when you want to contribute, and we will then bring you in to the discussion. We would like to be able to have just one conversation so the chat function will be used for this only. We will finish promptly at

I'd like now to invite ... to tell their story".

Information on grounding techniques

Mindful breathing

There are many useful resources on tools and techniques to support mindfulness, as a way of reducing anxiety and tension and focusing on the present, our bodies, and emotions.

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mindfulness/>

You may want to include mindful breathing as part of the routine introduction to the session, or brought into the session if the facilitator feels that emotions are running high. Simply find a comfortable position and close your eyes. Take a moment and concentrate on the feeling of your breath on your nostrils as you breathe in and then out. This will help to bring us to the now and help us sense areas of tension in our bodies associated with any strong feelings and emotions we are experiencing.

The Butterfly Hug

The second technique is the Butterfly Hug, which can accompany mindful breathing. Cross your hands across your chest, so your fingers are close to your collar bone. Each hand touches the opposite upper arm or shoulder. Then simply then move your hands like the wings of a butterfly, to tap your arms/shoulders in an alternating rhythm. Practice this alongside mindful breathing, to bring yourself to a sense of calm.

FAQs

We are struggling with facilitator capacity; can you facilitate virtual Rounds as only one facilitator?

No – it is important for the safety of the session and your confidence as a facilitator that you are not the only person responsible for both the containment and the technological access of the Round. If something is said by a participant that impacts you in a way that is unexpected, or that you experience technical difficulties, it is important that you have someone there who can competently continue to run the session. Remember that your Schwartz Round mentor or a member of The Point of Care Foundation, or perhaps another facilitator in the community, may be available to help in the event of reduced capacity so do contact us.

What is the recommended maximum and minimum numbers for a virtual Schwartz Round?

This is up to you really and will depend slightly on your organisational context and journey with Rounds. If you are new – you may want to start off with capping the virtual Rounds at around 35 so you don't have too many people lining up to talk and then not being able to. As you get more confident, and your organisation becomes more familiar with Rounds – you may want to increase this number. Some sites have been running large virtual Rounds. As a minimum, it is unsafe to run a virtual Round with anything less than 8 people in the audience. It is crucial there are enough people to validate the storytellers' stories.

Can we use pre-recorded stories, given the reduced capacity of staff at this time?

We have begun to develop a stories digital library so that you can use stories in the event there is not enough time for story preparation or availability of storytellers. Please feel free to use those, though we would recommend where you can, to use members of your organisation as storytellers as this will allow a deeper level of the connection and reduction in isolation in members.

Similarly, the storyteller will be validated and normalised in telling the story and hearing the responses from the audience.

The model of Rounds originally included food. Can we provide something if we want?

Yes – absolutely. Again, we just want to keep the planning workload to a minimum. As this is meant to be an online session when sending the invitation, you may suggest to people that ten minutes before the start they make a cuppa and grab a bite to eat to help them slow down. You could also start the meeting early and have a message up on screen inviting people to begin to slow down, and to ensure they have something to eat/drink.

How do you ensure the emotional wellbeing of the storyteller/participants when you are not in the same room? And as is the case with the participants, if you cannot see them?

What is important about these sessions is that people feel their emotions are normalised and validated. This will mostly happen organically, with participants responding to each other's contributions, but it is important as a facilitator to intervene if you feel you can hear/see attendees are beginning to get distressed. It may be that you have to introduce a grounding exercise here, and also articulate that the feelings being expressed are valid and common in the circumstances we find ourselves in.

There may be people that are not contributing, that you cannot ensure are not distressed. We have written in the introductory script that you invite those who are not contributing or feel the need to leave because of feeling distressed to write to you privately so you or a dedicated attendee in the audience can follow up.

It is important to remember that people have joined the session with a knowledge of the kind of discussion that is to come. So, they will also be able to take responsibility for their presence in the session. Remember to be clear in the joining instructions of the Round, so that people have joined with full knowledge and have accepted the kind of forum it is.

How do we ensure it does not become a debrief – which we know now can be more damaging?

This is where the importance of the storytelling preparation comes in. With the story preparation, you will be able to set the tone for the discussion. What comes up in the stories will likely be mirrored by the participants. Your role of the facilitator in working with the storyteller is to normalise the emotions coming up in the story, not to analyse them or probe deeper. The stories will then allow people to normalise and validate the emotions. Similarly, throughout the discussion you may need to continually articulate that the emotions coming up are valid and normal considering the circumstances.

How are PoCF supporting facilitators throughout the implementation?

Schwartz Round mentors will provide active support to help with implementation and in some cases to co-facilitate some of your early sessions, if helpful. Meanwhile, do refer to your mentor or anyone from the POCF team if you need advice or support.