DIJE BOOK CLUB
TIPS FOR FACILITATORS


Tasks:

1. Initiate the discussion – we have provided a list of possible questions to get you started. You may choose, for example, to go around the room and allow each person a brief period to make an “opening statement” before going on to in-depth discussion of specific questions or topics. This will also give you a sense of what the members of the group think is important or interesting.

2. Make sure all members of the group have the chance to speak (some may not want to say much, but all should be afforded the opportunity).

3. Curtail lengthy digressions; some digressions may arise naturally and even add to the discussion, but make sure they don’t lead the group too far astray. The object is to concentrate primarily on the shared material at hand, i.e. the book.

4. Interject questions when the discussion is running out of steam. Some groups may practically self-lead once the conversation gets rolling; others may need impetus along the way.

5. If necessary, make it clear that in a book discussion group everyone “agrees to disagree.”

Managing common challenges:

1. One person dominates the group and doesn’t let other people speak. An effective way to deal with this situation can be to recognize everyone who has something to say and then assign an order in which they can speak. When a reasonable amount of time has passed, point out that is now the next person’s turn.

2. One strong personality dictates the tenor of the discussion. Make regular reminders, starting at the beginning of the session, that differences of opinion make for lively discussion and that the object is not to develop consensus but to share a variety of viewpoints. You may want, after a particularly strong statement by a dominant personality, to ask if anyone has a counter opinion to offer.

3. Multiple discussions develop at the same time, especially in larger groups. Set out ground rules at the beginning about having only one conversation going on at the same time. If necessary, you can even ask people to raise their hands and be recognized before speaking. You may need to play the “heavy” from time to time and actually stop ancillary conversations. It isn’t fun, but it will lead to a better experience for everyone in the long run.

4. Conversation diverts too far off track. Try to interject another question, or mention that while the point is interesting, you need to steer the conversation back towards the book because of time limitations.
5. Discussion lags. Now is the time to go back to your list of prepared questions or to interject some of your supplementary material.