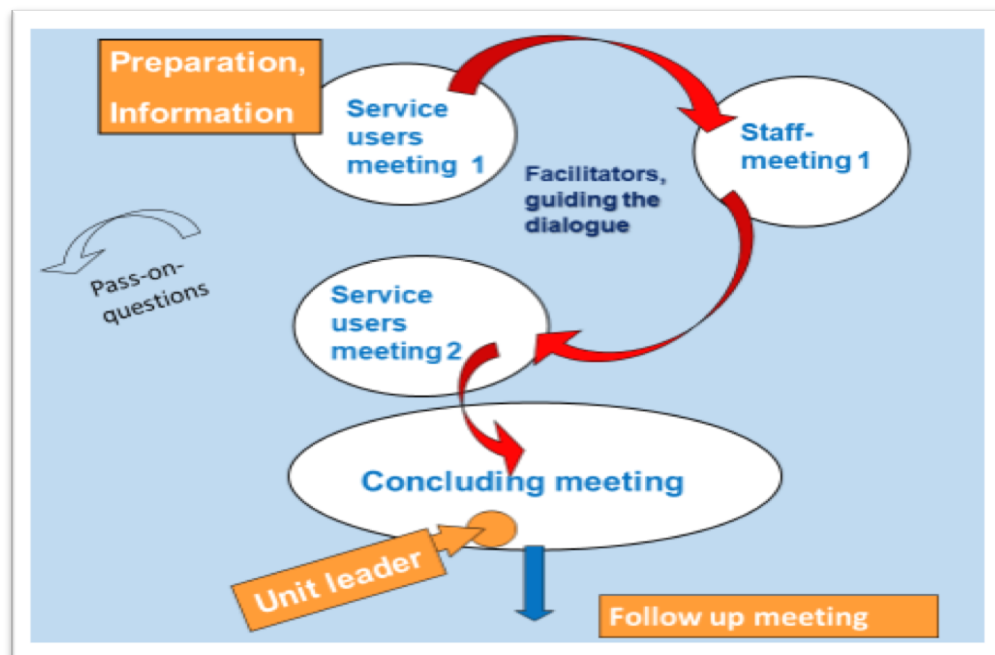




## The Involvement Model, IMO - a path towards Empowerment

IMO (in Swedish DMO, Delaktighetsmodellen) is a method for creating an equitable and participatory dialogue between groups of people. The purpose is to empower people with a “weak voice” to be heard, get involved and to experience self-determination in matters of concern to them. It has been developed in organizations for social care and support, mainly involving users with disability and elderly people and the staff. It can also be used in another context. The key issue should always be imbalance in power and influence between the participating groups.

The most common way of using the model is between two groups of “stakeholders”, one with a weak voice and the other with a stronger voice. This means that persons with the stronger voice have more authority and influence over matters of concern for both groups. The purpose is to empower persons in the weaker of the two groups by creating an open and trustful dialogue. To achieve this the dialogue is design in a special way that has proved to be efficient.



Picture 1: The Dialogue loop

IMO has a potential to highlight a bottom-up perspective and in doing so strengthening the voices of the persons in the weaker voice group. The main intention with IMO is that the individual will be strengthened (empowered)

when acting together with peers with whom they share everyday living conditions. The dialogue, charged with special steps and frames, has proved to have impact on such predicted objectives. It consists of separate meetings for each group before they meet all together in a concluding meeting. The weak voice group always start the dialogue loop. All group meetings are led by two IMO-guides, Facilitators, who are neutral to the participants. They keep the talks going on close to the selected theme and make sure that everybody get a chance to have their say. They monitor the process of the dialogue loop and support equality between the participants.

The Facilitators work in pairs or as a team if a user-Facilitator is included. They have all a short training in leading such groups. They are not members of either group or have close relations to any of them. If they belong to the staff in the community – they do not work at the same unit where the users live or work. They should be seen as “outsiders”.

In an IMO dialog between service users and staff, pass-on-questions will be passed on from the user group to the staff group who will send their own p-o-q's to the users. The questions should stimulate reflection and in-group talk. The Facilitators have an important mission in helping both groups to find out a few p-o-q's to each other. These questions becomes the hub of the dialogue as they meanders through the loop.

At last, in the concluding meeting, the p-o-q's will be considered and participants reach some kind of solution, proposal, new questions or ideas. The purpose of the dialogue is not to reach consensus – but some kind of agreement or suggestion e.g. to do or change something and so on.

To complete a dialogue loop could take one or two days or it could expand to three or four weeks. Normally it takes between two and three weeks due to how easy or difficult it is to find suitable appointments for all participants. It is important to concentrate the dialog to keep the theme and p-o-q alive and up to date.

To maintain the framework of the model some rules are crucial. These are:

- 1) Service users participate voluntary and are properly informed
- 2) Participants from the staff cannot be replaced during the loop
- 3) The service users can join the loop as late as their second group meeting, before the concluding meeting
- 4) The dialogue loop is guided by special trained Facilitators
- 5) The Facilitators are not involved in support and service to the participants; they are “outsiders”
- 6) The staff leader has responsibility for implementing the IMO
- 7) The theme of the dialogue should be in the interest of the service users
- 8) The dialogue loop provides egalitarian meetings between users and staff

- 9) The group meetings constitutes a coherent conversation, “the dialogue loop”
- 10) The group meetings follow a certain order
- 11) The pass-on-questions are the main thread of the dialogue
- 12) A follow up meeting is recommended to estimate the results of the pass-on-questions.
- 13) The dialogue loop is periodic recurring.

### Who gain what from the IMO dialogue?

Two stakeholders (parties) participate. Each group has an interest and concern for the same matter(s) or situations, something they share. One of them have a “weak voice” and the other a “strong voice”. This means that one of them have more influence over matters discussed than the other group has. The weak voice group always starts the dialogue loop and by doing so they sets the agenda concerning the theme. These group members participate voluntarily and the long-term goal for them should be a feeling of increased empowerment.

The other group participate as a part of their ordinary work. They might get more enlightened about the users life and daily situation. Through this form of dialogue, the user perspective will be a source of knowledge and will strengthen an evidence-based setting (community care).

This dialogue is something else than a discussion between two groups. The loop consist of preparation in ones on group together with people you share the same daily circumstances. This will encourage the art of listening to each other, learning from others in the group and dare to speak up.

The pass-on-questions give the opportunity for the weak voice group to express ideas, suggestions, wishes that the members share. The can “think loud” and with help of group members and the Facilitators these questions will emerge.

When the staff listen to the pass-on-questions they often get surprised, impressed and glad that the users come up with interesting and good viewpoints. Staff often say they discovers a new perspective on matters that means something for the service users.

### Current mode of IMO/DMO in Sweden

The model has been used for several years in Sweden in the context of care for people with disability (mostly people with intellectual disability or mental illness) and elderly persons. Depending on who is participating, the dialogue focus on different questions and themes with relevance for the user group and the staff.

The model has been used in other contexts than care and support. Other examples are between students and teachers at a university; between people with disability and local politicians; between employees and staff leaders. It has

been tried when evaluating user services, e.g. at school between pupils/students and their teachers or involving users in the evaluation process as a participatory design. Children and adolescents have also tried the model in different settings. The central issue should always be imbalance of power and influence between the participated groups.

The main purpose of the IMO dialogue are the same in all these different settings:

- to empower the individual through support from the group and shared experiences
- to disclose inattentive domination from others, to unfold consequences and to *mitigate such imbalances*
- It's about understanding and learning for all involved.

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