

Designing facilitation for a knowledge share fair: Practical steps

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Introduction

Share fairs are an excellent opportunity to foster informal networking and problem solving, to bring the concept of knowledge sharing to life, and to show participants what can be done to have a truly interactive and participatory event. A share fair enables the elicitation of both tacit and implicit knowledge as well as know-how: what might be obvious for those who have experience in their own field of work may remain a mystery for others. The share fair itself is normally composed of several different sessions (technical sessions, debates, market, open sessions, etc.). As much as possible, sessions should be facilitated using knowledge sharing methods, which can take many different forms such as interactive discussions, presentations, brainstorming, mapping, interviews, fishbowl, or World Café.

However, given the multitude of possible methods and tools, it can be challenging to know which to use, and when. Beyond selecting knowledge sharing methods to facilitate knowledge exchange, it is critical that they support the over-arching goals of the event. This requires time (before and during the event) and resources (human, financial, material).

What is a share fair?

Knowledge share fairs are interactive and collaborative workspaces; they usually last two to three days and are composed of facilitated sessions and informal exchanges and often offer a "market place." These participatory events enable people to share experiences, learn from each other, and acquire new ways of working and sharing knowledge, as well as creating linkages and networks for future collaboration. Engagement, interaction and shared learning are essential elements in order to bring out tacit knowledge and know-how, and reveal collective knowledge.

This article is based on experiences and lessons learned from share fairs in Niamey, Niger (2010, 2012), Rome, Italy (2009, 2011), Cali, Colombia (2010), Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (2010, 2012), Founzan, Burkina Faso (2012) and Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso (2013), Amman, Jordan (2013) and Nairobi, Kenya (2014). It describes the work done and coordinated by the facilitators to elicit good practices and lessons learned as part of the sessions, presentations and discussions, but will not cover the logistical aspects of organizing a share fair.

What is the goal of a share fair?

Defining the focus and objective of the event is necessary at an early stage. The organizers should know what they want to get out of the event: what is the desired output for the intended future outcome? What are the specific technical areas the participants would like to discuss and learn more about? The facilitator will need to clarify what are the expectations and also what products will be developed after the event. When the organizers define common areas of interest, these set the boundaries within which themes will be agreed and are the base for inviting proposals and contributions from participants. For example, the overarching topic of a share fair might be 'Resilience in the Sahel region', with a more specific theme such as 'pastoralism'. The outcome could be 'good practices to strengthen resilience in the region' and the product of the share fair 'a compendium of good resilience practices on pastoralism'. During the whole event, the facilitators will support the process of sharing experiences and knowledge between the participants, using specific methodologies to keep them engaged in order to identify potential good practices on pastoralism to be documented and shared after the event.

Who's who?

The principal actors of a knowledge share fair are:

1. The organizing committee: composed of the focal points of the teams dedicated to the technical content, the communication (promotion, media relations, reporting, social media), the logistics (administrative matters and procurement), and the facilitation;
2. The resource persons, subject matter experts who will present or pay attention to technical content of a session;
3. The facilitators for each session, whether plenary or group sessions, with a main facilitator as coordinator; and
4. The participants.

The main facilitator will work with the focal points of the different groups of actors as their area of work can influence the way the facilitators will be able to work.

The difference between moderator, facilitator and rapporteur

Avoid having too many cooks in the kitchen.

In some cultures and in some languages, moderators are understood to be facilitators. However in English, the term moderator designates the role of chairperson. A chairperson doesn't need to be a facilitator as he or she introduces the people who are going to present. His or her role may also include summarizing the main points of the interventions at the end of the meeting.

While the facilitator works on the process, the rapporteur focuses on the content and outcome. As a rapporteur, it is helpful to ask the facilitator to check if the report is in line with the results of the facilitated session. On the other hand, a resource person is technically in charge of the content. It is thus important to differentiate who is responsible for the technical content, and who will facilitate the process.

Why engage a facilitator in the planning?

Organizing a share fair requires a lot of advanced planning. It is necessary to budget enough resources and time (before, during and after the event). Often the facilitation team is hired externally and only called in for the event itself. This is a typical pitfall to be avoided.

To shape an event, its agenda, number of parallel sessions, and time to be devoted for breaks, it is important to include the main facilitator throughout the whole planning process, so facilitation is well designed and understood by the organizing committee and all people involved.

A lot of the practical organizational choices will have an impact on the facilitation design, including: the venue, types of rooms available, flexibility of the room setting in order to move tables and chairs, the possibility of a central space for coffee and tea breaks where participants will be able to gather in-between sessions, a central location for the market place or exhibition, and planned breaks to provide networking time.

The organizers and their partners should understand the role of the facilitator (beginning with the preparation of the event), the different roles each team member will play, the need to have one facilitator per session and the type of facilitation method that can help to get the best outputs from the session.

When and how to select facilitators?

The organizing team should not wait until the last minute to recruit the facilitators. The main facilitator is ideally on board when drafting the programme. This person can help recruit the other facilitators. A call for facilitators can be sent through networks and to partners. Such a call includes dates, location, topics, languages needed, skills requested, deadline for sending CVs and where to send them.

For the organizers, selecting the main facilitator is not simply an issue of reading a curriculum vitae but also understanding during an interview whether the facilitator has the required experience for such an event, knows the techniques, has the flexibility to adapt the process due to last minute changes, can facilitate in different languages and is sensitive to cultural aspects. Gender balance in the facilitation team is desirable. If there are several facilitators, appointing a lead facilitator is highly recommended, both for coordinating the facilitation team and also for ensuring collaboration with the other share fair teams. Once the selections are made, ensure that the administrative team issues contracts and organizes travel arrangements in a timely fashion.

Collaboration between the different teams

It is essential to agree on roles and respective responsibilities among the members of the different teams. Some roles are not to be mixed (e.g. facilitators are not to be expected to also do session reporting, although they can contribute). Effective collaboration between the different teams (facilitators, rapporteurs, core team and support staff) during the preparatory stages and daily wrap-up meetings will contribute to the smooth running of the share fair and allow adjustments to be made as needed.

A great tool for collaboration among different teams is the session information sheet, which centralizes all relevant information about each session: time of the session, place, title, theme, names resource persons, facilitator, facilitation method and type of format, material needed, name of reporting person, etc. The session sheet is prepared in collaboration between the content team and facilitation team. At the time of the event, the session sheets will be distributed to each team member. It can be used for the reporting, adding the elements to be included by the rapporteurs at the end of the session.

When several facilitators are needed due to parallel sessions in the program, the organizers ensure that the same facilitator does not facilitate multiple sessions back to back, as each session requires advance time for specific preparations (face-to-face meetings with resource people, checking session material, distributing necessary hand-outs, gathering participants' feedback after the session, etc.).

The equipment needed for the facilitators should be ordered on time and available a few days before the share fair. Having volunteers to assist the facilitators is helpful (For example: to go and get paper, pass microphone in the room, resolve technical issues).

Drafting the agenda

The content team reviews the submissions and selects and regroups the proposals by theme so that sessions can be built along similar content. The facilitator can then advise members of the content team on the most appropriate session format to reach the goal of the event and get their approval before contacting the resources persons or subject matter experts involved in the session. The roles need to be clarified at this stage to avoid confusion between the content and the process.

For each session, the facilitator will consider the topic, the number of presenters, the possible audience, and the space. What facilitation method might best suit this session? What are we trying to achieve/ elicit/ encourage? How do we know what would work better in this context? There is no right or wrong answer, but some methods will work better than others, depending on the circumstance.

Very often, technical resource people will be at ease if they can come with a PowerPoint Presentation prepared as guiding notes rather than a few points illustrated with visuals. Long or overloaded presentations with text are not conducive to knowledge sharing. Therefore in the call for proposals, the organizing committee would advocate for creative ways of presenting and sharing. A few ideas can be suggested, making reference to the knowledge sharing toolkit (www.kstoolkit.org)ⁱ where methods such as storytelling, World Café, fishbowl, and chat show are explained. In the initial discussion with the presenters and resource people, the facilitator will explain a favored choice and alternative possibilities. Presentations are to be short, to the point, and used as teasers to enable sharing of experiences, knowledge and know-how with the participants.

Knowing the venue

The venue plays an important role in the success of a share fair. It should offer different rooms for the sessions, and spaces for the market place, tea, coffee and lunch breaks. A person from the organizing committee visits the venue several weeks in advance in order to plan how the space will be used during the event and liaise with the venue's management regarding details such as the setting of plenary room and other spaces. Ideally, the facilitator with the organizing team spends a day or two on the spot before the event to prepare the spaces and make sure that everything is in order and the venue offers areas for sitting in a more relaxed mode. This visit will also allow the assignment of rooms to specific sessions and a check of how modular the space is (i.e. how quickly the room could be rearranged in-between sessions). This will also be the opportunity to check if all material required for the sessions is available and adequate.

A central place for tea and coffee is ideal, as this will also be the space dedicated to the market place (where participants can also leave their brochures, posters, and extra information). If water, tea and coffee can be served during the whole day, this place will become the center of the event and enable greater networking. In this central place, the

facilitators and the organizers will be able to communicate with the participants and propose options for sharing experiences outside the facilitated sessions.

A long break for lunch provides time for networking and organizing short open space sessions for participants who want to share their experience outside the programmed sessions. A lunch buffet is the ideal solution as it avoids a long queue and enables participants to decide when they want to eat.

Each space can be an opportunity to vary the facilitation method

If all the session formats are similar, participants will get tired and lose attention and enthusiasm for sharing. Diversifying the type of sessions and methodologies used will make people participate and interact.

The following seventeen methods are those most commonly used during share fairs; detailed explanations of all methods can be found on www.kstoolkit.org.

Being in the plenary room can be the opportunity to know each other, with short introductions using the *speed dating* method.

Speed dating: An energizer for people to get to know each other. People get to present themselves to each other in a short amount of time before moving on to another person. The facilitator can give them a specific subject to frame the presentation. www.kstoolkit.org/Speed+geekingⁱⁱ

If you wish to put participants on the same wavelength, reconstructing their history together, the *river of life* is a possibility.

River of life: A visual narrative method, using drawing rather than text, to reflect on the past, tell the present and imagine the future of an activity or a project. It can be used to build a shared view from differing perspectives.
www.kstoolkit.org/River+of+Lifeⁱⁱⁱ

If there are many experts in the room, you may wish to organize a *treasure hunt* that will enable people to discover the wealth of knowledge available in the room and opportunities to learn from each other.

Treasure hunt: Participants are requested to form a team of five or six people. Each team selects an expert to whom other participants can ask questions on a specific subject. The other members of the team need to hunt the treasure hidden in other experts' minds in the room; coming back with plenty of wealth that they were able to collect.

Instead of traditional speech, keynote speakers could be asked to prepare a TED talk or some variations.

TED is a nonprofit devoted to spreading ideas, usually in the form of short, powerful talks (18 minutes or less). www.ted.com/about/our-organization^{iv}

A *theatre play* can be used to introduce the main theme of the share fair, presenting the various issues through different characters.

Theatre play: A useful method, which merges the oral communication potential of theatre with the reality of communities. This method aims at understanding local experiences, constraints and ideas that might otherwise be hard to uncover.

Telling a story during a presentation or in place of a presentation is a good way to illustrate issues. It can be accompanied by images projected in the background.

Storytelling: Storytelling is an ancient practice, helping us to share our knowledge with context and emotion; we can share that tacit side of what we know. Storytelling triggers listeners to respond with other stories, building new understanding. Stories can capture and hold our attention, increasing the likelihood of hearing and learning. www.kstoolkit.org/Storytelling^v

Exploring divergent points of view, listening to different opinions can be done using the *fishbowl* or the *Samoan circle*, or a livelier chat show.

Fishbowl: A method involving a small group of people (usually 5-8) seated in circle, having a conversation in full view of a larger group of listeners. It provides a creative way to include the "public" in a small group discussion and is useful for ventilating "hot topics" or sharing ideas or information from a variety of perspectives. www.kstoolkit.org/Fish+Bow^{vi}

Samoan circle: Similar to the fishbowl process, the Samoan circle has people seated as a group with an inner circle in the middle, but only those in the inner circle are allowed to speak. Others have a chance to speak only if they join the "inner circle." It is a leaderless meeting method intended to help negotiations in controversial issues. www.kstoolkit.org/Samoan+Circle^{vii}

Chat show: This method's open circle layout encourages participants to share experiences in an informal environment. It requires minimal preparation and can be initiated in a workshop where participants don't yet know each other or the organizers. www.kstoolkit.org/Chat+Shows^{viii}

Having all participants in the room is an opportunity to invite them to brainstorm all together using for example the World Café.

World Café: A group interaction method set up like a café where small groups of people move from one table to another for 10-minute sessions. After each session, a table host remains and the other participants change table, enriching the answers of the previous group. After the entire exercise, the answers are shared with everyone, revealing common points and particular ideas.

www.kstoolkit.org/The+World+Cafe^{ix}

The variation of the World Café called the round robin can be either used for brainstorming or to get actions down on paper.

Round robin: Similar method to World Café. It has a playful character if really done fast, i.e. if people are "rushed" from one post to the next. Participants experience how much more the collective knows and come up with than each person individually. www.kstoolkit.org/Round+Robin^x

After the round robin, the facilitator can refine the results and prioritize actions using the *dotmocracy* method.

Dotmocracy: Method for collecting and prioritizing ideas among a large number of people. Participants write down ideas and apply dots under each idea to show which ones they prefer. The final result is a graph-like visual representation of the group's collective preferences. www.kstoolkit.org/Dotmocracy^{xi}

If the session goals include planning for the future, the *future search* methodology may be useful. It can open the participants' mind to the dreamed possibilities.

Future Search: Future Search is a large-scale interactive planning process enabling diverse stakeholder groups, each with their own agenda, to achieve shared goals through collaborative action. It is used to address a major challenge shared by multi stakeholder groups. www.kstoolkit.org/Future+Search^{xii}

In smaller rooms, the Peer assist gives the chance to a participant to have his or her issue resolved with the support of the peers.

Peer assist: This method brings together a group of peers to elicit feedback on a problem, project, or activity, and draw lessons from the participants' knowledge and experience. This can lead to finding potential solution(s) to the problem raised. www.kstoolkit.org/Peer+Assists^{xiii}

Instead of the theatre play, *role-play* can present different views shared among participants and be used to start the debate.

Role-play: A useful technique to analyze a variety of themes based on concrete, real-life situations. It can be used in conjunction with visualized board work in presenting issues and demonstrating the results of group work.

The central place used for breaks and market place is the ideal area to share ideas, programme changes, and new proposals. This is where a knowledge tree can be drawn, or a democracy wall posted, giving participants a chance to express themselves. A big board for the *open space* sessions will indicate which rooms or spaces are free during certain time slots, and which can be used by participants who want to share an issue they cherish and would like to discuss with others. If there are tables or stands with material, the facilitator can organize a quiz to be filled out while visiting the market place.

Open Space: A method for convening groups around a specific question or task or importance and giving them responsibility for creating both their own agenda and experience. The facilitator's key task is to identify the question that brings people together, offer the simple process, then stand back and let participants do the work. www.kstoolkit.org/Open+Space^{xiv}

As tea and coffee breaks are networking moments, it can be fun to have a *bingo* game during which participants should encounter as many people as possible to reply to the questions.

Bingo: An energizer for people to get to know each other. Different statements about people are put on a card, and you need to find the names of the people in the room, that correspond to the statements, by asking them questions.
www.kstoolkit.org/Bingo^{xv}

Tea and coffee breaks are good moments for sharing around posters brought by the participants. In the plenary session, the facilitator should inform participants about the various options for informal sharing: e.g., Open Space sessions, posters, bingo.

Adapting to changing circumstances

Careful planning ensures a smoother delivery of the share fair. However, being flexible and able to adapt facilitation approaches is also essential. Speakers may be delayed, power and equipment may fail, and the best-laid plans may need to be changed at the last minute. The facilitator will need to consider the session goal: how can this still be reached, using a different methodology or approach? What would be needed to make that happen with the resources at hand? The facilitator must be creative and talk to the share fair organizers. It is important to explain changes to participants and involve them, if possible, to jointly focus on delivering an interesting and engaging session. Perhaps using pin boards instead of tables may be a solution, or getting people out of their chairs and moving around may open more options.

Adapting on the spot

At the 2013 Ouagadougou share fair, a *marché aux idées* (ideas market) was planned. Various methods were planned: a large World café, an interactive marketplace with stands or tables, and other facilitation approaches. On the day, due to visiting dignitaries, time was cut short, access to the room was limited, and the planned methods were not possible. The facilitators had to think on their feet, and chose to use an adapted Round robin, a variation of the World café. In the plenary hall, four thematic corners were set up with this question on quickly written flipcharts. *“During the Fair, what is the key innovation you have discovered to increase resilience?”* The participants were counted off into four groups; each shepherded by a facilitator, and then divided into smaller informal groups. All were asked to discuss and identify a common answer, with seven minutes for each question round. The lead facilitator kept time and signaled time to change with music from a cell phone. Like a marketplace, the process was noisy, engaging, and very much enjoyed by participants, who provided excellent comments.

How to facilitate an event in different languages?

People will be able to share more easily when they can speak their own language because they will feel at ease. Interpretation is an important expenditure and its cost should not be underestimated, but it is worth the money, as to have participants come to a meeting without being able to participate is a poor investment.

Interpretation should be planned in the plenary room even when not used with all the participants. When people break up in smaller groups or into different rooms, it can become difficult to organize professional simultaneous translation. Therefore, when breaking up into groups, one option is to bring together people speaking the same language. This certainly has an advantage, as translating is not necessary during the group work, only during the presentation afterwards. Nevertheless it is important to analyze what impact this will have on the outcome of group work. Organizers may also keep the groups mixed and ask for volunteers to whisper translation to their peers, but this can be disruptive.

During the Ouagadougou share fair, professional interpreters who were present in the booths and planned for the session were asked to come out of the booth and each assist one group with translations. It was interesting to see how both interpreters became fully involved in facilitating the group work and yet remained neutral in terms of content, very much as a facilitator's assistant. The same was not true when in another session, a participant who mastered both languages was asked to assist the group with translation. Since the participant was a technical expert, he was logically inclined to express his opinions and got involved in the lively discussion in the main language, leaving aside participants who were not able to follow.

It is also very useful to prepare all the material for the group work in different languages, even if they will be hosted in only one language, to support a better understanding of non-native speakers.

Documenting a session

Unless the facilitator is a graphic facilitator (see www.kstoolkit.org/Graphic+Facilitation)^{xvi} and uses this art to document a specific session, it is not the role of the facilitator to document the session. Documenting a session is done by the rapporteur, the social media team or the designated technical experts supporting the session, also referred to as resource persons. What the facilitator can do, depending on session format, is to capture key messages of the session, for example on flipcharts. At the end of each session, having options for feedback from participants helps capture impressions, also from those who did not speak much. This is up to the facilitator to organize; flipcharts can be used. Providing men and women with differently colored adhesive paper for their feedback helps to distinguish between the needs, expectations and opinions of both sexes. Key comments should be noted by the session reporter, and captured for later use by the rapporteur and possible post-event analysis. Photographing flipcharts is a quick way to do this, however it is important to remember to label the flipchart with theme, number, date and session name.

Getting feedback

Getting feedback is crucial to allow improvement during and after the share fair. It is therefore suggested to get feedback at the end of a session, at the end of the day and at the end of the share fair.

At the end of the session, ask participants to give their opinion on the session, on what they take back home and what they miss. You can also use colored post-it to differentiate the opinion of men and women. For a quick indicator of the satisfaction level of the audience, the *mood-o-meter* is a good option.

Mood-o-meter: By sticking up dots people can indicate how they feel about a specific topic or question on a specific scale (for example: from 0 to 5, from strongly agree to strongly disagree).

At the end of the day, the organizing team meets to check how things went and what can be changed for the next day. The same exercise is to be done at the very end of the share fair as lessons learning.

An After Action Review (AAR): A simple process used by a team to capture the lessons learned from past successes and failures, with the goal of improving future performance. It is an opportunity for a team to reflect on a project, activity, event

or task so that they can do better the next time. It can also be employed in the course of a project to learn while doing.

www.kstoolkit.org/After+Action+Review^{xvii}

Encompassing intercultural considerations and local context

As a facilitator it is important to collect enough information about the context in which the event takes place. Every culture has its own customs that need to be taken into account. For example, in some countries a strict protocol must be followed for the opening session. Delays of high-level representatives for this opening can have repercussions on the rest of the agenda. Having a plan B is essential!

When designing sessions, it is important to look at appropriate ways of having men and women work together in sessions. How can opportunities be created for different people to have their voices heard (also for young people, for example)? Good time keeping is critical, to keep to the schedule. Include appropriate breaks.

When planning the sessions, consider how dense the agenda can be, depending on the participants. Working with farmers may require a different approach than planning sessions with academics. What are people used to and comfortable with? Do not embarrass people by making them interact if they don't want to.

It is also important to respect local customs. As facilitators, we promote each participant having an equal voice. However local hierarchy may complicate this, which needs to be balanced carefully. It can be helpful to review methodologies with the local team to see if they are appropriate. For example, in some cultures using a cowbell to signal time to gather may be acceptable and slightly humorous, whereas in other cultures it would not be appropriate, and could be considered insulting.

Are there local traditions that could be built on? For example, the Sahel has a rich oral tradition of storytelling. How could this be included?

For example, in a number of Western African share fairs, the facilitators integrated a Western African proverb in most of the sessions: at the beginning to introduce the theme of the session or at the end as part of the synthesis of the session. This technique contributed to bringing the participants together around a common cultural understanding. It also helped securing an informal atmosphere within the group, which is useful for the spirit of knowledge exchange during a share fair.

After the share fair

The facilitators should discuss from the beginning with the organizers how they will handle the follow-up of the share fair. A share fair is not a standalone event, but the

beginning of new collaborations, exchanges and partnerships. Follow-up can be as important as the organization of the event itself, because, after all, the goal is the uptake of new knowledge and strengthening collaboration. The facilitator could also be involved in the follow up.

The reason for facilitating such an event is to bring added value in sharing knowledge, making implicit and tacit knowledge more explicit.

Therefore, before the end of each session, the facilitator should say a few words about the methodology selected for the sessions and why. This way, participants learn and will be able to use this specific methodology and other approaches that they discovered during the whole event, for future work with partners or in team.

Conclusion

- As main facilitator, request to be on board as soon as possible, and if possible try to be part of the organizing committee or at least attend its meetings. Have facilitation explained to the organizing committee, showing examples of previous events.
- Gather as much information as possible on the venue to see what will be possible in terms of facilitation. As the space needs to be conducive to sharing, it is important to have several rooms and a central place for the market place next to the tea and coffee area.
- Make sure you create, together with the organizers, enough opportunities for informal exchanges. Influence these choices when drafting the agenda.
- Learn about the social and cultural context you will be working in before starting to plan the facilitation. Every theme, every country, every subgroup has its own particularities that have to be taken into account if you want the facilitation of the share fair to be a success.
- Check the arrangements made for interpretation but also use of national languages during the event that may not be used by interpreters.
- As with all facilitation, it is important to adapt to the group. Do not force members to do something they do not want to do. Listen to them, observe their reactions (spoken and unspoken): the participants are at all times at the center of the process.
- Get feedback at the end of the session, the end of the day and the end of the share fair.
- Show the value of facilitation so that participants can adapt the methods in their work after the share fair.

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Paper. Designing facilitation for a knowledge share fair: practical steps
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Abstract

Share fairs are an excellent opportunity to bring the concept of knowledge sharing to life, and to show participants what can be done to have a truly interactive and participatory event. A share fair enables the elicitation of both tacit and implicit knowledge as well as know-how.

Based on the experience of several share fairs held between 2009 and 2014, this paper details the role of the facilitator in the design process and the importance of selecting a good mix of knowledge sharing methods to support knowledge exchange and the event's over-arching goals. It outlines the work done and coordinated by the facilitators to draw lessons learned and identify good practices within the sessions, presentations and discussions. The paper also addresses how session design must consider local and cultural contexts and how approaches can be adapted at short notice to accommodate changing circumstances.

Keywords: share fairs, facilitation, knowledge sharing, methods, approaches, Burkina Faso, Colombia, Ethiopia, Italy, Jordan, Kenya, Niger

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ⁱ Accessed 4 May 2015

ⁱⁱ *Ib.*

ⁱⁱⁱ *Id.*

^{iv} *Id.*

^v *Id.*

^{vi} *Id.*

^{vii} *Id.*

^{viii} *Id.*

^{ix} *Id.*

^x *Id.*

^{xi} *Id.*

^{xii} *Id.*

^{xiii} *Id.*

^{xiv} *Id.*

^{xv} *Id.*

^{xvi} *Id.*

^{xvii} *Id.*