

Introduction

It's impossible to be part of an organization today and not attend meetings. Staff meetings, project meetings, task force meetings, planning and coordinating meetings . . . the list is endless. The worst thing about many of these meetings is that they're poorly run and waste valuable time.

Over the past decade, there's been a growing recognition that effective meetings happen when proper attention has been paid to the process elements and when proceedings are skillfully facilitated.

For a long time, facilitation has been a rather vague and poorly understood practice, mastered only by human resource types. This situation needs to change. We're now spending so much time in meetings and being asked to achieve so many important goals in teams that there's a growing need for skilled facilitation throughout our organizations and our communities.

Instead of being relegated to HR, facilitation is fast becoming a core competency for anyone who's on a team, leading a task force, heading up a committee, managing a department or teaching. All of these people need to be able to create and manage effective group dynamics that foster true collaboration.

Facilitation is also a central skill for today's managers, who are riding wave after wave of change. New demands are being placed on them. At the same time, the old command and control model of supervision, which worked for decades, isn't working anymore.

To get the most from people today, leaders have to know how to create buy-in, generate participation and empower people.

To keep pace, tomorrow's leaders need to be coaches, mentors and teachers. At the core of each of these new roles is the skill of facilitation.

The Goal of This Book

This practical workbook has been created to make core facilitation tools and techniques readily available to the growing number of people who want to improve their process skills. It represents materials and ideas that have been collected, tested and refined over twenty years of active facilitation in all types of settings.

This second edition retains the core tools and instruments that made the original version so popular. In addition, new materials have been added to every chapter.

As in the first edition, *Facilitating with Ease!* remains a practical workbook. While it builds on the theories of organization development pioneers such as Chris Argyris,

Donald Schon, and Edgar Schein, this resource doesn't aim to be theoretical. Instead, its focus is on providing the reader with the most commonly used process tools, in a simple and accessible format. This is not so much a book to be read, as one to be used!

The Audience

This workbook contains valuable information for anyone facilitating group interactions. This is a huge constituency which includes:

- team leaders and team members
- project and task force leaders
- any supervisor or manager who holds staff meetings
- community development practitioners
- community leaders working on neighborhood projects
- teachers in traditional classroom settings
- therapists who lead support groups
- marketing consultants who run focus groups

With its focus on asking instead of telling, listening and building consensus, facilitation is the essential skill for anyone working collaboratively with others.

Facilitating with Ease!

- adult educators teaching in continuing education
- mediators of “interest-based bargaining”
- quality consultants leading process improvement initiatives like Six Sigma
- consultants intervening in conflicts
- anyone teaching others to facilitate
- anyone called on to lead a discussion or run a meeting

For the sake of clarity, many of the strategies and techniques in this book are described from the perspective of an external facilitator. These same tools work equally well, however, whether the facilitator comes from inside or outside of the group. The book also mentions team leaders and workplace teams often, but again, the tools and applications apply to any and all facilitation situations.

Content Overview

The book is organized into nine chapters. Checklists and tools have not been collected in an appendix, but are located throughout each chapter, near the related materials.

Chapter 1 outlines what facilitation is and its main applications. It differentiates process from content, and outlines the core practices. It also addresses facilitation issues such as neutrality, how assertive a facilitator can be and how to balance the role of the group leader with that of the facilitator.

Chapter 1 also describes who can best facilitate in various situations. It provides information about the language of facilitation, the principles of giving and receiving feedback, plus a thumbnail sketch of the best and worst practices of facilitators.

A new section on facilitation in the classroom has been added for teachers who use this powerful tool to enhance the education experience.

At the end of the chapter, there are two observation sheets and a four-level skills self-assessment, useful to anyone hoping for feedback on current skills.

Chapter 2 explores the stages of a planned facilitation. It describes the importance of each step in the facilitation process: assessment, design, feedback, refinement and final preparation. Helpful checklists are also provided to guide the start, middle and end of any facilitation session.

Chapter 3 focuses on knowing your participants and provides information about the four most commonly used needs-assessment techniques. Sample assessment questions and surveys are provided. This chapter also discusses the differences between facilitating groups and facilitating teams and passes along strategies for getting any group to behave more like an effective team. The creation of team norms is discussed, along with an overview of the team growth stages and the corresponding facilitation strategies that work best at each stage.

Chapter 4 begins with a frank discussion of the many reasons people are often less than enthusiastic to be involved in a meeting or workshop and provides tested strategies for overcoming these blocks, including ideas on gaining buy-in. High participation techniques are also shared, along with a training plan to encourage effective meeting behaviors in members.

Chapter 5 delves into the complexities of decision making. Facilitators are introduced to the four types of discussions and the importance of clarifying empowerment. Five different methods for reaching decisions are described and differentiated. The pros, cons and uses of each approach are explored, along with an expanded discussion of consensus building.

Chapter 5 also offers an overview of the behaviors that help decision effectiveness and provides the steps in the systematic consensus-building process. The chapter ends with a discussion of poor decisions: their symptoms, causes and cures. A survey is provided with which a group can assess its current decision-making effectiveness.

Chapter 6 deals with facilitative strategies for handling both conflict and resistance. It begins

with an overview of the difference between healthy debates and dysfunctional arguments. It goes on to share techniques that encourage healthy debates and the steps in managing any conflict. Special attention is paid to facilitator strategies for venting emotions. The five conflict-management options are also explored and placed into the context of which are most appropriate for facilitators.

Chapter 6 also provides a three-part format for wording interventions that tactfully allow a facilitator to redirect inappropriate behavior. Also described are the two approaches a facilitator can choose when confronted with resistance and why one is superior. At the end of the chapter, nine common facilitator dilemmas and their solutions are presented.

Chapter 7 focuses on meeting management. There's a useful checklist and meeting effectiveness diagnostic that lets groups assess whether or not their meetings are working. There's also a chart that outlines the symptoms and cures for common meeting ills. The fundamentals of meeting management are outlined, with special emphasis on the role of the facilitator as compared to the traditional chairperson role. Both mid-point checks and exit surveys are explained, and samples are provided. Since teleconferencing is so prevalent in today's workplace, strategies are offered for using facilitation techniques during distance meetings.

Chapter 8 contains the essential process tools that are fundamental to all facilitation activities. These include: visioning, brainstorming, gap analysis, decision grids, priority setting, systematic problem solving, survey feedback, sequential questioning, force-field analysis, multi-voting, troubleshooting, needs and offers negotiation and root cause analysis. Each tool is described along with step-by-step directions for its use in groups.

Chapter 9 pulls it all together by providing ten sample process designs, complete with facilitator notes. These facilitator notes describe

each meeting design in detail and set an example for how facilitators should prepare their design notes. The ten samples are the most commonly requested facilitations and provide the reader with graphic illustrations of the level of detail a facilitator needs to consider before stepping in front of any group.

After years of experience as a consultant, project manager, team leader and trainer, I'm convinced that it's impossible to build teams, consistently achieve consensus or run effective decision-making meetings without highly developed facilitation skills. The good news is that these skills can be mastered by anyone! I hope you find *Facilitating with Ease!* to be a valuable resource in your quest to gain this important skill.

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Questions Answered in This Book

- What is facilitation? When do I use it?
- What's the role of the facilitator?
- What are the main tools and techniques?
- What are the values and attitudes of a facilitator?
- How neutral do I really need to be?
- How assertive am I allowed to be?
- How can facilitation be used in the classroom?
- How can I facilitate when I'm not the official facilitator?
- How do I get everyone to participate?
- How do I overcome people's reluctance to open up?
- What's the difference between a group and a team?
- How can I get a group to act like a team?
- What do I do if a group is very cynical?
- What do I do if I encounter high resistance?
- What if there's zero buy-in?
- What are my options for dealing with conflict?
- What if a meeting falls apart and I lose control?
- What decision-making techniques are available?
- Why is consensus the best method to use?
- What can go wrong in making decisions?
- How do I make sure that discussions achieve closure?
- How can facilitation be used to manage conference calls?
- How do I balance the roles of chairperson and facilitator?
- What facilitation tools are available?
- How do I design an effective process?
- How do I know whether the meeting is going well?
- What are the elements of an effective meeting design?

Some Definitions

Facilitator:

One who contributes structure and process to interactions so groups are able to function effectively and make high-quality decisions. A helper and enabler whose goal is to support others as they pursue their objectives.

Content:

The topics or subjects under discussion at any meeting. Also referred to as the task, the decisions made or the issues explored.

Process:

The structure, framework, methods and tools used in interactions. Refers to the climate or spirit established, as well as the style of the facilitator.

Intervention:

An action or set of actions that aims to improve the functioning of a group.

Plenary:

A large group session held to share the ideas developed in separate subgroups.

Norms:

A set of rules created by group members with which they mutually agree to govern themselves.

Group:

A collection of individuals who come together to share information, coordinate their efforts or achieve a task, but who mainly pursue their own individual goals and work independently.

Team:

A collection of individuals who are committed to achieving a common goal, who support each other, who fully utilize member resources and who have closely linked roles.

Process Agenda:

A detailed step-by-step description of the tools and techniques used to bring structure to conversations.

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Chapter 1

Understanding Facilitation

In many organizations, the idea of using a neutral third party to manage and improve meetings is now taking root. The result: the emergence of a new and important role in which the person who manages the meeting no longer participates in the discussion or tries to influence the outcome. Instead, he or she stays out of the discussion in order to focus on how the meeting is being run. Instead of offering opinions, this person provides participants with structure and tools. Instead of promoting a point of view, he or she manages participation to insure that everyone is being heard. Instead of making decisions and giving orders, he or she supports the participants in identifying *their own* goals and developing *their own* action plans.

More and more organizations are now adopting this role within their meetings. In all of the above examples, the meeting manager was acting as a *facilitator*.

What Is Facilitation?

Facilitation is a way of providing leadership without taking the reins. It's the facilitator's job to get others to assume responsibility and take the lead.

Here's an example: Your employees bring you a problem, but instead of offering them solutions, you offer them a method with which *they* can develop their own answers. You attend the meetings to guide the members through their discussions, step-by-step, encouraging them to reach their own conclusions.

Rather than being a player, a facilitator acts more like a referee. That means you watch the action, more than participate in it. You control which activities happen. You keep your finger on the pulse and know when to move on or wrap things up. Most important, you help members define and reach their goals.

What Does a Facilitator Do?

Facilitators make their contribution by:

- helping the group define its overall goal, as well as its specific objectives
- helping members assess their needs and create plans to meet them
- providing processes that help members use their time efficiently to make high-quality decisions
- guiding group discussion to keep it on track
- making accurate notes that reflect the ideas of members
- helping the group understand its own processes in order to work more effectively
- making sure that assumptions are surfaced and tested

The purpose of facilitation is enhanced group effectiveness.

A meeting without a facilitator is about as effective as a team trying to have a game without a referee.



Facilitation is a helping role.

- supporting members in assessing their current skills, as well as building new skills
- using consensus to help a group make decisions that take all members' opinions into account
- supporting members in managing their own interpersonal dynamics
- providing feedback to the group, so that they can assess their progress and make adjustments
- managing conflict using a collaborative approach
- helping the group communicate effectively
- helping the group access resources from inside and outside the group
- creating a positive environment in which members can work productively to attain group goals
- fostering leadership in others by sharing the responsibility for leading the group
- teaching and empowering others to facilitate

The bottom line goal of facilitation is group effectiveness.

What Do Facilitators Believe?

Facilitators believe that two heads are better than one, and that to do a good job, people need to be fully engaged and empowered.

All facilitators firmly believe that:

- people are intelligent, capable and want to do the right thing
- groups can make better decisions than any one person can make alone
- everyone's opinion is of equal value, regardless of rank or position
- people are more committed to the ideas and plans that they have helped to create
- participants can be trusted to assume accountability for their decisions
- groups can manage their own conflicts, behaviors and relationships if they are given the right tools and training
- the *process*, if well designed and honestly applied, can be trusted to achieve results

In contrast to the old notion of leadership, in which the leader was viewed as the most important person at the table, a facilitator puts the members first. Members decide what the goals are, make the decisions, implement action plans and hold themselves accountable for achieving results. The facilitator's contribution is to offer the right methods and tools at the right time.

Facilitating is ultimately about shifting responsibility from the leader to the members, from management to employees. By playing a *process* role, we encourage the members to take charge of the *content*.

Facilitators believe that two heads are better than one.

What Are Typical Facilitator Assignments?

As a facilitator you could be asked to design and lead a wide variety of meetings. These might include:*

- a strategic planning session
- a session to clarify objectives and create detailed results indicators
- a priority-setting meeting
- a team-building session
- a program review/evaluation session
- a communications/liaison meeting
- a meeting to negotiate team roles and responsibilities
- a problem-solving meeting
- a meeting to share feedback and improve performance
- a focus group to gather input on a new program or product

*Sample agendas for a wide range of meetings have been provided in Chapter 9.

Differentiating Between Process and Content

The two words you'll hear over and over again in facilitation are *process* (how) and *content* (what). They are the two dimensions of any interaction between people.

The *content* of any meeting is *what* is being discussed: the task at hand, the subjects being dealt with and the problems being solved. The *content* is expressed in the agenda and the words that are spoken. Because it's the verbal portion of the meeting, the content is obvious and typically consumes the attention of the members.

Process deals with *how* things are being discussed: the methods, procedures, format and tools used. The *process* also includes the style of the interaction, the group dynamics and the climate that's established. Because the *process* is silent, it's harder to pinpoint. It's the aspect of most meetings that's largely unseen and often ignored, while people are focused on the *content*.

A facilitator's job is to manage the process and leave the content to the participants.

| Content | Process |
|---|--|
| What | How |
| The task The subjects for discussion The problems being solved The decisions made The agenda items The goals | The methods How relations are maintained The tools being used The rules or norms set The group dynamics The climate |

When a meeting leader offers an opinion with the intent of influencing the outcome of discussions, she or he is acting as the “content leader.”

In summary, a facilitator’s job is to manage the *process* and leave *content* to the participants. When a meeting leader is neutral on the content and actively orchestrates the action, he or she is acting as the “process leader,” or facilitator.

At first glance, facilitation may seem like a rather vague set of “warm and fuzzy,” people-oriented beliefs. But as you’ll learn, it’s actually a highly structured and assertive set of practices with a rich set of tools and techniques. Once you understand these techniques and learn how to apply them, you’ll immediately see substantial improvement in the overall performance of any group.

Facilitation Tools

As a facilitator you’ll have an extensive set of tools at your disposal. These tools fall into two categories: *Core Practices* and *Process Tools*.

The *Core Practices*, which are rooted in the manner, style and behavior of the facilitator, include:

- staying neutral
- listening actively
- asking questions
- paraphrasing
- synthesizing ideas
- staying on track
- giving and receiving feedback
- testing assumptions
- collecting ideas
- providing summaries

The *Process Tools*, which are structured activities that provide a clear sequence of steps, include:

- Visioning
- Brainstorming
- Anonymous Brainstorming
- Force-Field Analysis
- Gap Analysis
- Multi-Voting
- Priority Setting
- Root-Cause Analysis
- Decision Grids
- Systematic Problem Solving

Understanding each of these tools and how to use them is a vital part of any facilitator’s job. In Chapter Eight, you’ll find detailed step-by-step instructions on how to apply these most frequently used process tools.

Core Practices Overview

Regardless of the type of meeting you’re facilitating, make constant use of the following core practices:

Stay neutral on content—your job is to focus on the process elements and avoid the temptation of exerting control over the content under discussion. While you can use questions and even make suggestions to help the group, facilitators never impose their opinions or take over decision-making powers.

Listen actively—this is listening to understand more than judge. It also means using attentive body language and looking participants in the eye while they’re speaking. Eye contact can also be used to acknowledge points and prompt quiet people to take part.

Facilitation has a rich set of tools and techniques.

Ask questions—this is the most important tool facilitators possess. Questions can be used to test assumptions, invite participation, gather information and probe for hidden points. Effective questioning encourages people to delve past the symptoms to get at root causes.

Paraphrase to clarify—facilitators paraphrase continuously during discussions. Paraphrasing involves repeating what people say to make sure they know they're being heard, to let others hear their points a second time and to clarify key ideas.

Synthesize ideas—ping-pong ideas around the group to build consensus and commitment. When people comment and build on each other's thoughts, it insures that the ideas recorded on the flip chart represent collective thinking.

Stay on track—set time guidelines for each discussion. Appoint a time keeper inside the group to use a timer and call out milestones. Point out digressions whenever discussion veers off topic. Park all off-topic comments and suggestions on a separate “Parking Lot” sheet, posted on a nearby wall, for issues to be dealt with later.

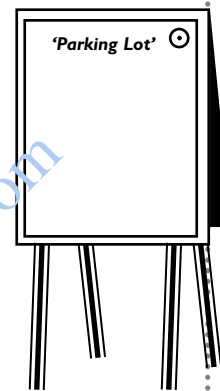
Use the spell-check button—since most people have difficulty spelling correctly on a flip chart, deemphasize spelling by drawing a spell-check button in the top corner of any flip sheet. Tell participants they can spell creatively, since pressing the “spell-check button” automatically eliminates errors.

Give and receive feedback—periodically “hold up a mirror” to help the group see itself so it can make corrections. Also periodically ask for feedback about the pace, process and content.

Test assumptions—facilitators always strive to bring the assumptions people are operating under out into the open and clarify them, so that they are clearly understood by everyone.

Collect ideas—keep track of both emerging ideas and final decisions. Make clear and accurate summaries on a flipchart or electronic board so everyone can see the notes. Notes should be brief and concise. They must always reflect what the participants actually said, rather than your interpretation of what they said.

Summarize clearly—an effective facilitator can listen to a complex set of ideas and then offer a concise and timely summary. Summaries can also be used to revive a discussion that has ground to a halt, or to end a discussion that needs to be wrapped up. Remember that summarizing is one of the main ways to arrive at consensus.



The core practices are the foundation of the facilitator's style.

Facilitating is essentially a questioning activity.

Praising ideas or responding to direct questions will take you out of the facilitator role.

Focus on Questioning

The importance of knowing how and when to ask great probing questions can't be stressed enough. In fact, effective questioning is *the key* facilitative technique. As a facilitator, you need to ask the right questions.

Questions invite participation. They get people thinking about issues from a different perspective. Even when acting as a neutral facilitator, you can share your good ideas by turning them into questions. Questions are also essential for getting feedback from participants about how things are going.

Effective questioning means:

- **Asking the right questions at the right time**—select the right type of question and phrase it so that it solicits the best possible response. Then, direct it to the right person.

IF YOU WANT TO ...

Stimulate everyone's thinking

Allow people to respond voluntarily or avoid putting an individual on the spot

Stimulate one person to think and respond

Tap the known resources of an "expert" in the group

THEN ...

Direct the question to the group

Ask a question such as "What experiences have any of you had with this problem?"

Direct the question to that individual. "How should we handle this, Bill?"

Direct the question to that person. "Mary, you have had a lot of experience in applying these regulations. What would you do in this case?"

- **Handling answers to questions**—if a group member directly asks you for your opinion about the content, you have three options:
 1. Redirect the question to another group member or refer it to the whole group.
 2. Defer any questions that are beyond the scope of anyone present and commit to getting back to the group with an answer later.
 3. Provide the answer yourself only after signaling that you are no longer playing the process role and are now providing expert input.
- **Responding to comments**—Facilitators often lose neutrality by praising an idea put forward by a member. Be careful when acknowledging the efforts of any respondents. Instead of praising the content by saying, "That was a good idea!" switch to praising the process instead by saying something like, "Thank you for offering that idea."

Question Types

There are two basic question types:

1. **CLOSED ENDED**
2. **OPEN ENDED**

Each has its uses:

| TYPE OF QUESTION | DESCRIPTION | EXAMPLE |
|-------------------|---|---|
| CLOSED | <p>Requires a one-word answer</p> <p>Closes off discussion</p> <p>Usually begins with “is,” “can,” “how many,” or “does”</p> | <p>“Does everyone understand the changes we’ve discussed?”</p> |
| OPEN ENDED | <p>Requires more than a “yes” or “no” answer</p> <p>Stimulates thinking</p> <p>Usually begins with “what,” “how,” “when” or “why”</p> | <p>“What ideas do you have for explaining the changes to our customer?”</p> |

Open ended questions are used more often and are superior to closed questions.

Questioning: Do's and Don'ts

| DO | DON'T |
|---|--|
| Ask clear, concise questions covering a single issue | Ask rambling, ambiguous questions that cover multiple issues |
| Ask challenging questions that will stimulate thought | Ask questions that don't provide an opportunity for thought |
| Ask reasonable questions based on what people know | Ask questions that most people can't answer |
| Ask honest and relevant questions | Ask “trick” questions designed to fool them |

Different types of questions create specific responses.

Questioning Formats

When selecting questions to ask, there is a broad range you can choose from. It's important to understand how each of these question formats achieves a slightly different outcome.

Fact-finding questions are targeted at verifiable data such as who, what, when, where and how much. Use them to gather information about the current situation.

e.g. "What kind of computer equipment are you now using?"
"How much training did staff receive at the start?"

Feeling-finding questions ask for subjective information that gets at the participants' opinions, feelings, values and beliefs. They help you understand views and they contain words like *think* or *feel*.

e.g. "How do you feel about the effectiveness of the new equipment?"
"Do you think the staff felt they received enough training?"

Tell-me-more questions can help you find out more about what the participants are saying. They encourage the speaker to provide more details.

e.g. "Tell me more." "Can you elaborate on that?"
"Can you be more specific?"

Best/least questions help you understand potential opportunities in the present situation. They let you test for the outer limits of participants' wants and needs.

e.g. "What's the best thing about receiving a new computer?"
"What's the worst thing about the new equipment?"

Third-party questions help uncover thoughts in an indirect manner. They're designed to help people express sensitive information.

e.g. "Some people find that computer training is too time consuming. How does that sound to you?"
"There is some concern about overly autocratic managers in many factories. Can you relate to that concern?"

"Magic wand" questions let you explore people's true desires. Also known as "crystal ball" questions, these are useful in temporarily removing obstacles from a person's mind.

e.g. "If time and money were no obstacle, what sort of a computer system would you design for the department?"

Sample Probing Questions

The following sample questions are designed to delve more deeply into a problem situation.

- How would you describe the current situation in this department?
- How would your most important customer describe it?
- How would a senior manager describe it?
- How long has this situation been going on?
- What makes it worse? ... better?
- To what extent are people aware of the problem?
- How do people feel about the situation?
- Why hasn't the problem been solved?
- Who wants change to take place? Who does not?
- Who contributes to the problem?
- How do *you* contribute to the problem?
- If the problem were totally resolved, what would the ideal situation look like?
- On a scale of 1 to 5, how serious would you say this problem is?

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|---|---------------------|---|-----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| not serious at all | | somewhat serious | | very serious |

- What are the most significant barriers to solving this problem?
- What are the parameters of this initiative? (time, money, materials)
- Are any solutions going to be taboo or unacceptable?
- How would you rate the overall level of commitment to making changes that have been agreed to?

| | | | | |
|-----|---|--------|---|------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Low | | Medium | | High |

- What are some boundaries that you would suggest for this initiative?
- What would be the best possible outcome of this initiative? ... The worst?
- What are the things that will help this initiative succeed?
- What are the potential blocks to success?
- What rules or guidelines would you like to suggest to guide the group interaction?

It's important to plan a set of questions before starting a facilitation.

Mastering the language of facilitation will help you avoid sounding critical or judgmental.

The Language of Facilitation

A specific style of language has evolved as a part of facilitation. These techniques are especially important when it comes to commenting on people's behavior without sounding critical or judgmental. The main language techniques are:

- paraphrasing
- reporting behavior
- describing feelings
- perception checking

Paraphrasing involves describing, in your own words, what another person's remarks convey.

"Do I understand you correctly that ..."

"Are you saying ..."

"What I'm hearing you say is ..."

You should be paraphrasing continuously, especially if the discussion starts to spin in circles or if people are getting heated. This repetition assures participants that their ideas are being heard. New facilitators often make the mistake of not paraphrasing enough.

Reporting behavior consists of stating the specific, observable actions of others without making accusations or generalizations about them as people, or attributing motives to them.

"I'm noticing that we've only heard from three people throughout most of this discussion."

"I'm noticing that several people are looking through their journals and writing."

By describing specific behaviors, you give participants information about how their actions are being perceived. Feeding this information back to participants in a non-threatening manner opens the door for individuals to suggest actions to improve the existing situation.

Descriptions of feelings consist of specifying or identifying feelings by naming the feeling with a metaphor or a figure of speech.

"I feel we've run out of energy." (naming)

"I feel as if we're facing a brick wall." (metaphor)

"I feel like a fly on the wall." (figure of speech)

As facilitator, you need to be in touch with how you're feeling and not be afraid to share those feelings with the group. It's very helpful to be honest with a group by telling them, *"I feel exhausted right now,"* or *"I feel frustrated."* This lets other people know that it's okay for them to express feelings.

Perception checking is describing what you perceive to be another person's inner state in order to check if you understand what he or she is feeling.

"You appear upset by the last comment that was made. Are you?"

"You seem impatient. Are you anxious to move on to the next topic?"

Perception checking is a very important tool. It lets you take the pulse of participants who may be experiencing emotions that get in the way of their participation.

The Rules of Wording

Since facilitators always strive to be neutral to insure that group members control outcomes, it's important to accurately record what people say without editing too much. If the facilitator changes too many words or adds words that they personally prefer, group members will feel that the facilitator has taken control of the proceedings. The first rule of recording ideas is, therefore, to faithfully record what people are saying.

Since people say much more than we can record in a few crisp statements, facilitators are always challenged to create a short, concise summary of the dialogue. This is tricky since it necessitates editing, which can lead to inadvertently changing the meaning of what is said.

Skillful facilitators are good at editing so that the shortened statement still manages to be faithful to the original idea. They do this by following these rules:

Rule #1—Use their words—Listen carefully for the key words that participants use and insure that these words are included in what gets written on the flip chart. Reinforce this by saying things like:

“I’m writing the word ‘disaster’ because you emphasized it.”

Rule #2—Ask permission to change words—If participants struggle to articulate a point or are at a loss to find the right words, offer wording, but get member approval to ensure that what's recorded reflects what people intended to say. Say something like:

“I’ve shortened what you said to this. . . . Is this OK?”

“Is it okay to record that this way?”

Another technique to keep up your sleeve is to ask people to dictate the exact words they want to see recorded. This is useful if you don't understand what they're saying or lost focus momentarily and can't remember what they said. In these situations say something like:

“Tell me what you want me to write down.”

“Give me the exact words you need to see on the page.”

This technique also works when people have rambled or shared long, convoluted ideas. Rather than taking on the task of creating a summary of their comments, ask them to take responsibility for doing this. Say something like:

“I want to be sure that I capture the important parts of your idea.

Shorten that down to one or two crisp sentences that I can record.”

Be very careful about the words that are recorded.

Managing the Flip Chart

A flip chart may look innocent enough, but remember that these three-legged beasts can trip you, make your handwriting look like kindergarten scrawl and make even familiar spelling impossible to recall. Here are some definite *do*'s and *don*'ts about flip charts.

Flip charts are essential for recording member ideas.

These dos and don'ts are as relevant to electronic recording devices as they are to paper flip charts.

| DO | DON'T |
|--|--|
| Write down exactly what members say. While their comments have to be edited somewhat, always use their key words. Check to make sure that what is written captures the meaning expressed. | Write down your personal interpretation of things. These are their notes. If unsure, ask, "What should I write down?" |
| Use verbs and make phrases fairly complete. For example, writing "work group" is not as helpful as "work group to meet Monday at 10 a.m." Always be sure the flip chart can convey meaning, even to someone who was not at the meeting. | Worry about spelling. If you make a fuss, it will inhibit members from getting up and taking a turn at facilitating. |
| Talk and write at the same time. This is necessary in order to maintain a good pace. Practiced facilitators can write one thing and be asking the next question. | Hide behind the flip chart or talk to it. Unless you are writing, stand squarely beside it, facing the members when reading back notes. |
| Move around and act alive. There is nothing worse than a facilitator who acts as though he or she is chained to the flip chart. If an important point is being made, walk closer to the person who is talking so you can better pay attention. | Stand passively at the flip chart while a long discussion is going on without writing anything down. Ideas don't need to be in complete sentences before recording them. Make note of key words and ideas. Comprehensive statements can be formulated later. |
| Write in black, blue or some other dark color. Use fairly large letters so it can be read from the back of the room. | Use script unless you have great handwriting. Avoid red and other pale pastels that are impossible to see from any distance. |
| Post flip sheets around the room so that people can keep track of what has been discussed. | Monopolize the flip chart. |
| Whenever appropriate, let others take over both large and small group facilitation. This builds commitment and reinforces the idea that this isn't the facilitator's meeting. | Monopolize managing the meeting process. |

What Does Neutral Mean?

Facilitation was created to be a neutral role played by an unbiased outsider. The role of this neutral, third party is solely to support group decision making without exerting influence over the outcome. Facilitators must, therefore, always focus on process and stay out of the content.

One of the most difficult things about learning to facilitate is staying within the neutrality boundary because facilitators often have insight into the subject under discussion. The issue of neutrality is further complicated by the fact that a lot of facilitation isn't done by disinterested outsiders, but by someone from within the group who has a real stake in the outcome.

Regardless of whether you're an outsider or a group member who has volunteered to facilitate, one of the toughest challenges is remaining neutral if you have important information that should be shared with the group or you think that the group is making a poor decision. In these scenarios, it's important to understand that neutrality can still be maintained by applying specific techniques.

1st Strategy—Ask Questions

Even though the role is dispassionate, it's important to realize that facilitators don't want to enable bad decision-making! If the facilitator has an idea that might help the group, he or she should *not* withhold it.

If the facilitator thinks that the group is overlooking an idea, the facilitator can introduce it as a question that sparks thought. For example, if the group is spinning its wheels because they can't afford new computers, the facilitator can ask: "What are the benefits of renting new computers as an interim strategy?"

Group members are being prompted to consider this option, but are not being told whether to accept or reject it. The facilitator's neutrality is maintained because he or she hasn't told the group what to do and decision-making control remains with the members.

2nd Strategy—Offer Suggestions

If the facilitator has a good idea that the group should consider, it's within the bounds of the neutral role to offer the group a suggestion for their consideration. He or she might say: "I suggest that you research the pros and cons of renting computers." Although this sounds like the facilitator has strayed into content, it's still facilitative if the content sounds like an offering, not an order. As with questioning, making suggestions doesn't violate neutrality as long as group members retain the power to decide.

Neither asking questions nor offering suggestions oversteps the boundaries of neutrality.

External parties can more easily remain neutral than leaders or peers.

3rd Strategy—Take Off the Facilitator’s Hat

If the group is about to make a serious mistake and all of the questioning and suggesting in the world has not worked to dissuade them, facilitators must sometimes step out of their neutral role.

In these cases, it is important to indicate that they are stepping out of the role and be clear that they are now playing a content role. He or she might say: *“I need to step out of the role of facilitator for a minute and advise you that the new computers being proposed are not within the realm of your current or future budget.”*

Since leaping in and out of the facilitator role causes confusion and distrust, taking off the neutral hat should be done very selectively. This role shift is justified when the facilitator is convinced that the group is in danger of making a major mistake. Leaders shifting in and out of the neutral role can suggest to participants that their ideas may be overturned whenever they don’t match the perception of the leader.

All facilitators need to be aware that there’s a difference between a neutral, external party asking a question or making a suggestion and a leader who’s doing these things. When an outsider asks questions or offers a suggestion, members feel helped in their decision-making process. When their leader does the same thing, they hear an order. Therefore, staying neutral while questioning and suggesting should take into account the power relationship between the players.

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How Assertive Can a Facilitator Be?

Consider this scenario. You're facilitating a meeting in which a key decision has to be made; however, two of the members get embroiled in a conflict. They take turns interrupting one another. Neither one is listening or acknowledging the other. Tempers rise. As the conflict escalates, you stand by helplessly saying nothing, in the mistaken belief that staying neutral means staying totally removed.

This scenario addresses a common misconception that taking a neutral stance on the content of meetings means being passive. This is far from the case. In fact, if you operate on the belief that your role is basically unassertive, you'll be in danger of ending up as nothing more than a note taker or scribe, while conflicts rage around you.

While it's true that facilitators should be non-directive on the topic being discussed, they have to be assertive on the process aspects of any meeting. It's within the parameters of the facilitator role to decide all aspects of the meeting process, including informing members how agenda items will be handled, which discussion tools will be used, who will speak in which order, and so on.

During discussions, a good facilitator is always assertive in managing member interactions. This involves asking people to rephrase negative comments, calling for breaks and changing the order of items if the flow needs to be adjusted.

This doesn't mean that you shouldn't collaborate with members on the session design. Gaining member input is always a good idea since it enhances buy-in. What it does mean is that process is the special expertise of the facilitator. In matters of process it's appropriate for you to have the final say.

Just how appropriate and necessary a high level of assertiveness is can be best understood when a group becomes dysfunctional. In these situations, facilitators need to be firm and act like a referee, stepping into the fray to restore order to the proceedings.

A high level of assertiveness on process is especially critical whenever there are personal attacks or other rude behavior. All facilitators are empowered to interrupt and redirect individuals so that their interactions become more appropriate. In the section on managing conflict (Chapter 6), you'll find more on techniques and language you can use for making interventions and managing stormy meetings. By following these practices, you'll be behaving in a way that's anything but passive.

Some assertive actions facilitators take, when the situation warrants it, include:

- insisting on meeting norms
- calling on quiet people
- stopping to check on the process
- calling time-outs and breaks
- intervening to stop rude behavior
- asking probing questions
- challenging assumptions
- adjusting the meeting design
- summarizing discussions
- insisting on closure
- insuring that action plans are in place
- implementing evaluation activities

New facilitators may mistakenly think they should be passive during conflicts.

External facilitators are automatically given greater credibility.

Leaders have to work hard to establish their neutrality.

Who Can Facilitate?

Once a group has recognized the need for facilitation, there's often confusion about who should take on the role. Should it be the leader of the group, a member or someone from the outside?

When to use external resources

An outsider is essential if the discussion to be held requires the full participation of all members. Choosing external facilitators to handle complex issues with large groups, such as a senior management retreat, is an excellent strategy.

External facilitators have several advantages:

- they're assumed to be a credible, expert facilitator
- they're above the fray and can walk away afterward
- they're unencumbered by political or emotional baggage
- they can often afford to take more risks
- they don't have to live with the decisions
- they get paid for their efforts as a professional

However, being an external facilitator also offers drawbacks:

- they lack data about the group and the organization, such as its history
- they don't know the personalities of the individuals involved
- they need to create rapport and comfort to ensure trust
- they don't get to see the initiatives of the group unfold

When leaders facilitate

Leaders can facilitate most meetings provided they aren't needed as members.

Leaders who facilitate have specific advantages:

- they understand the issues and resources of the group
- they know the degree of risk that can be assumed
- they feel comfortable with the members
- they know the strengths and weaknesses of individuals

The disadvantages for any leader who facilitates include:

- others may not see the leader as neutral
- the leader is not automatically given credibility as a facilitator
- the leader's presence may hinder openness
- the facilitator role may run counter to the leader's traditional style

When members facilitate

On the ideal team, all members have highly developed facilitation skills and take turns managing meetings. Like the leader, members will encounter many of the same challenges, such as having to earn credibility and working hard to stay neutral.

Members who facilitate will also have to deal with the dilemma of being cast into a leadership role, which may create a power shift within the group.

Balancing the Roles of Leader and Facilitator

When you're an outside facilitator, you'll often find yourself managing meetings at which the regular leader is also present. This can be a source of power struggles, when it needn't be.

Since there is a clear delineation between content and process functions, the two roles can easily remain distinct. Make it clear that the leader will be participating as a member of the group, while as the facilitator, you'll manage the meeting process.

Role problems often stem from the fact that the manager doesn't want to be "just a member" of the team. She or he may be used to a more controlling style and may want to dominate both the discussion and also how the meeting should be run.

All experienced facilitators have stories about clients who meddle in process designs to the point at which these designs need to be repaired mid-meeting. These repairs often represent a return to the design originally proposed by the facilitator.

Since it's the facilitator who's on the spot when a design doesn't work, leaders and members need to be diplomatically asked to give their ideas and advice, and avoid dictating the actual meeting process. This all-too-common dilemma reinforces the need to clarify roles right at the preplanning stage, so that everyone understands that the facilitator has the final say on how the meeting is run.

Many managers use external facilitators because they have difficulty staying neutral. When a manager is domineering, she or he often ends up hampering the active participation of other members.

It's quite appropriate for you to advise a potentially "controlling" manager to temper his or her role. The best way to ensure that there is close cooperation between leader and facilitator is to meet before the session and plan the agenda together. As the facilitator, you need to know what the leader wants to achieve at the session, which items are most important and how much time is appropriate for each item. There is a more detailed description of strategies for dealing with controlling leaders on page 73.

Clarify roles before the meeting to avoid power struggles.

Facilitators often have to wear more than one hat.

Wearing More Than One Hat

While the rule about neutrality is beyond question, there are situations in which the facilitator may be wearing more than one hat. When this happens, it's important to tell the participants which hats are being worn and to clearly signal when you're stepping out of the neutral role.

The Expert Hat—this happens when the facilitator is also an expert in the subject being discussed. Some examples of this are a team building expert facilitating a team formation exercise or an experienced town planner facilitating a community planning discussion.

The pitfalls of being both the expert and the facilitator—unconsciously slipping in and out of the expert role so often that participants become unsure whether they're being asked to make a decision or being told what to do.

The hat balancing strategy—declare your expertise up front. Identify how the group can use your knowledge. Agree on when and how the group can access your expertise. Always signal clearly that you're switching hats before you do so. Ask someone else to facilitate those segments of the meeting where you need to join the conversation.

The Advocate Hat—this is the most difficult hat to balance with the notion of neutrality. It crops up when the facilitator has a strong set of beliefs about the topic area. Some examples are the environmentalist leading a public meeting to decide the placement of a landfill site, or the spiritual leader helping a community group to identify its goals.

The pitfalls of being both an advocate and a facilitator—structuring conversations in such a way that they point in a particular direction. Asking overly leading questions or making suggestions with such passion that participants feel pressure to agree. Slipping into unconscious selling.

The hat balancing strategy—declaring one's philosophical views at the onset so that people will be able to filter personal biases from questions. Always asking permission before expressing philosophical views and deliberately taking off the facilitator hat to add or influence content.

The Leader Hat—this is a very common facilitation combination, especially in a team environment. This occurs whenever a person with official decision-making power assumes the neutral role with people over whom they have authority. Leaders are often so used to giving opinions and making decisions that they can't relinquish control. Sometimes group members resist leaders taking on the facilitator role, either out of fear of speaking openly or because having the leader make all the decisions absolves them of responsibility.

The pitfalls of being both a leader and a facilitator—facilitating with conclusions in mind, then unconsciously driving the group to the outcome they favor. Not recognizing that followers will tend to hear their questions and suggestions as orders. Unconsciously slipping in and out of the facilitator role, which makes members distrustful of the facilitator's neutrality.

The hat balancing strategy—taking care not to declare a bias. Structuring conversations so that people are asked to look at all sides of an issue. Inviting others to challenge established ideas. Using techniques like anonymous brainstorming and multi-voting. Asking other people to facilitate discussions in which the leader bias simply cannot be put aside.

Role Dilemmas

When you lack the authority to facilitate—one of the most common role dilemmas is when the leader of the group is either unaware of facilitation or is facilitating badly, and another member wishes that they could assume the role, but feels they lack the needed authority.

The answer to this dilemma lies in the fact that facilitation is essentially a powerless role: facilitators lead by the consent of the participants. This means that anyone can become the facilitator if they ask for the role and group members agree.

This can be done on the spot in any meeting where facilitation is needed. It can also be negotiated ahead of time with the group's leader or existing facilitator. To avoid threatening others, you might identify that facilitation is your personal learning priority and ask for support from the group members while you are working to master it.

When facilitating a group of three or four people—there are lots of meetings attended by only a small group. If four people are making a decision and one of them assumes the facilitator's role, this removes a valuable resource from the conversation. Most groups can't afford to bring in an outside facilitator, nor can they afford to lose the valuable ideas of a member who plays the neutral role.

There are a number of solutions to this dilemma. The facilitator can write down his or her ideas before the meeting for presentation by one of the other group members during discussions. The facilitator can add their ideas by asking probing questions and offering suggestions. The facilitator can insure that they make their comments last after others have offered their ideas. The facilitator can also add their ideas by taking off their facilitator's hat and temporarily stepping out of the role.

Anyone can become the facilitator if participants consent.

Facilitation in the Classroom

With its emphasis on creating participation and drawing on the wisdom of participants, facilitation is a natural training tool, especially when dealing with adults. In fact, facilitation has deep roots in the practice of adult education or andragogy. You will see from the following list that the principles of how adults learn are the same as the ones that inform key facilitator strategies. These principles are that:

- adult learners are motivated to learn when they have a need
- adults learn best when they're engaged in setting their own learning goals
- adult learners are capable of self-direction
- adults possess a large bank of knowledge and learn best when they can link new skills to their existing knowledge
- adult learners have established values and attitudes that need to be considered in order to ensure that learning is relevant to them
- adults can learn by reading, listening and watching, but will learn better if they're actively involved in the process
- adult learners have a preference to relate their learning to practical applications and real world situations

A main difference between pedagogy (child education) and andragogy (adult education) is that they follow different steps:

Pedagogy

- 1) Present materials
- 2) Memorize materials
- 3) Practice
- 4) Reinforce learning

Andragogy

- 1) Provide experiences
- 2) Reflect on experiences
- 3) Add theory input
- 4) Identify applications

Here are some examples of facilitation activities being used in the classroom to leverage participant commitment and knowledge.

At the start of a learning activity:

- change the room arrangement from theatre style to flexible seating to allow for the creation of small groups
- acquire tools like flipcharts and markers that encourage sharing of ideas
- use interviews or a survey to assess participants' existing skills and make the class aware of the skills present in the group
- help students identify their specific learning needs
- invite participants to identify their personal learning goals and share these with the group
- link each person with a learning partner to work on assignments in a partner or team setting

Adults learn:

50% of what they see and hear

70% of what they say

90% of what they say and do.

- engage participants in conducting field research, holding interviews and gathering data about the topic
- identify case scenarios that are relevant to the learners' real-life situation
- ask participants to identify the key questions they want to have answered during the training; collect and post these

During a learning activity:

- provide case studies, class projects or other hands-on experiences to encourage participants to learn from experience
- if applicable to the subject matter, design the training to feature coaching and feedback
- structure reflection activities so that students can formulate their own theories and draw on their knowledge base
- encourage learners to formulate their own conclusions before presenting theoretical materials
- relate key learning points to back-home applications by helping participants identify implementation strategies

At the end of a learning activity:

- invite learners to write challenging questions that can be incorporated into exams
- have students take part in panels to answer questions from peers who grade their responses
- ask participants to share key learning points with their partners or project team members
- engage all participants in an evaluation of the learning process.

In all of these activities, the educator acted as a facilitator, paying as much attention to how the learning was structured as to the content being presented. In the classroom, the facilitative trainer aims to create the conditions that support adults as they learn, rather than being primarily responsible for transmitting new information. Facilitative trainers ask questions to encourage students to seek their own answers, because adults learn more effectively using this approach. In the facilitated classroom, learners spend most of their time in exploration, discussion and feedback activities to create the learning that is most meaningful to them.

Facilitating in the classroom is more about supporting students as they learn, than about teaching.

Facilitation As a Leadership Style

Today's managers are using facilitation as a cornerstone of their leadership style.

Using facilitation means learning to live with the decisions of others.

For decades organizations have wanted leaders to have all the answers, take charge and make the tough decisions. The result of this directive style is that many managers are “hooked” on being in control. Under these circumstances, employees are often reluctant to openly express their opinions. There are many groups that are impossible to facilitate if the official leader is in the room. After all, who’s going to feel comfortable expressing an opinion if there’s even the slightest chance it might contradict what the “boss” thinks? An employee who feels this way will tell you that he or she doesn’t want to make decisions and isn’t paid enough to be held accountable.

Over the decades, the “command and control” model of leadership has created a culture in which those at the front line have been relegated to the role of “doers” and totally underutilized as thinkers. This directive leadership style is in decline today. This style may have worked in the old-fashioned world of assembly lines, but it’s a terrible waste of human resources in today’s knowledge-driven world.

Today’s organizations need to harness the intelligence, commitment and energy of all their members. This level of engagement can only be fostered by a shift in leadership: from telling to asking, from controlling to facilitating. While there’s a pressing need for all leaders to become more facilitative, this is often a difficult challenge.

The transition to facilitative leadership is hampered by the old notion that those in a leadership position ought to make most final decisions. The fastest way any leader can change his or her directive style is to become facilitative at meetings. Instead of participating in the discussion, leaders can use facilitation to empower and ensure that other people’s best ideas are brought out. Of course, this is easier said than done.

The reality is that facilitation promotes a more democratic way of making decisions, which is a major adjustment for some leaders. While there will always be some decisions that should be made by one person, a facilitative leader aims to create consensus on issues. Managers who adopt facilitation, therefore, need to accept that consensus and majority voting will become the dominant decision-making methods. Shifting one’s style to facilitation means learning to live with the decisions of others.

Some managers try to get the best of both worlds by having one of their team members become an expert at facilitation, while they stay in the control mode. While this may seem to work, the leader will ultimately discover that using facilitation makes the group’s culture more democratic regardless of who is actually standing at the flip chart.

Managers who are reluctant to facilitate sometimes fear they’ll be left with no real role to play. This is a misconception. When a leader facilitates, he or she is needed just as much as before because “process” leadership is such a full and important job.

The Power of Facilitation

When leaders shift their paradigm from controlling and directing to facilitating and empowering, they often feel as though they've given up all of their familiar "power tools." In reality, there's a substantial amount of power and control built into the role of facilitator. The difference is that this power is exerted indirectly—through the application of process, rather than through control of content. Consider the following examples of how process can be used to manage and control the activities of a group.

| Situation | Old Directive Approach | Facilitative Process Approach |
|----------------------------------|--|---|
| Members misbehave | → give them a pep talk about getting along | → have members create rules they agree to abide by |
| A bad decision is made | → overturn it, then explain why | → have members critique their decision using objective criteria |
| Members overstep their authority | → rein them in, supervise more carefully | → expand empowerment to meet the needs of specific situations |

When operating in a group setting, a facilitator actually has much more control than a manager operating without process tools. With process knowledge, a leader can exert tremendous influence. Using a facilitative process approach, leaders can:

- get groups to set and commit to ambitious goals
- build and maintain high-performance teams
- run efficient and highly effective meetings
- engage groups in process improvement
- settle conflicts between groups
- systematically solve organizational problems
- manage interpersonal dynamics

Rather than viewing facilitation as a disempowering change, leaders need to see the inherent advantages in being a "master of process."

Facilitation techniques give leaders tools for managing groups.

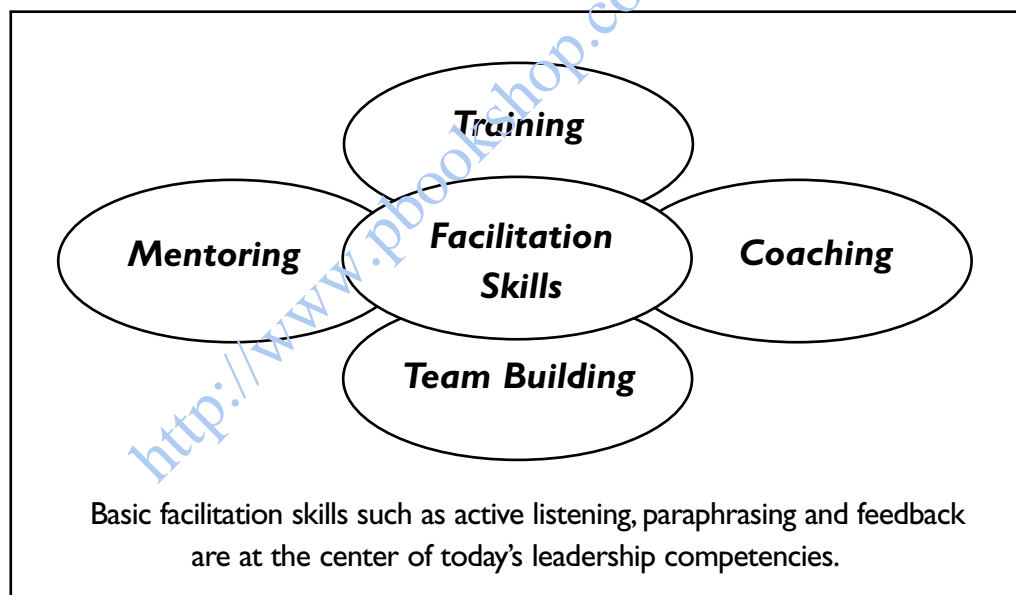
The Impact of Facilitating

Never underestimate how a shift in leadership paradigm impacts others. When you're a leader who facilitates, staff are encouraged to stop relying on you for answers and will draw on their own resources. Instead of coming to you with questions, they learn to bring solutions. Instead of complying with orders, they'll participate in creating plans to which they'll have a high level of commitment. When presented with more information, they'll offer more ideas. When given more decision-making authority, they'll weigh options more carefully. Instead of waiting for direction, they'll become engaged in setting the direction.

When you adopt a facilitative approach, each group member becomes a leader because there are opportunities to take initiative. In fact, the hallmark of a good leader is that all of the group's members become leaders themselves. Similarly, the sign of a great facilitator is that all members of the group become skilled facilitators, too.

Facilitation skills are central to other important leadership functions.

Facilitation As a Core Leadership Competency



Best and Worst Facilitator Practices

Some of the best things that a facilitator can do:

- carefully assess the needs of the members
- probe sensitively into people's feelings
- create an open and trusting atmosphere
- help people understand why they're there
- view yourself as serving the group's needs
- make members the center of attention
- speak in simple and direct language
- work hard to stay neutral
- display energy and appropriate levels of assertiveness
- champion ideas you don't personally favor
- treat all participants as equals
- stay flexible and ready to change direction if necessary
- listen intently to fully understand what's being said
- make notes that reflect what participants mean
- periodically summarize related ideas into a coherent summary
- know how to use a wide range of process tools
- make sure every session ends with clear steps for the next meeting
- insure that participants feel ownership for what has been achieved
- end on a positive and optimistic note

Some of the worst things a facilitator can do:

- remain oblivious to what the group thinks or needs
- never check member concerns
- fail to listen carefully to what's being said
- lose track of key ideas
- take poor notes or change the meaning of what's said
- try to be the center of attention
- get defensive
- get into personality battles
- put people down
- avoid or ignore conflict
- let a few people or the leader dominate
- never check how the meeting is going
- be overly passive on process
- push ahead on an irrelevant agenda
- have no alternative approaches
- let discussions get badly sidetracked
- let discussions ramble without proper closure
- be oblivious about when to stop
- be insensitive to cultural diversity issues
- use inappropriate humor

Facilitator Behaviors and Strategies

Regardless of whether you're a facilitator from within the group or from outside, the team's leader or a member, the following are parameters for facilitator behaviors.

Be Informed—Successful facilitators always gather extensive data about their prospective participants in order to fully understand both their business and their needs. They survey and interview participants, read background reports and use prepared questions to build a complete picture of the group's situation.

Be Optimistic—Facilitators don't let disinterest, antagonism, shyness, cynicism or other negative reactions throw them off. Instead, they focus on what can be achieved and strategies to draw the best from each participant.

Be Consensual—Facilitation is fundamentally a consensus-building process. Facilitators always strive to create outcomes that reflect the ideas of all participants equally.

Be Flexible—Successful facilitators always have a process plan for all meetings, yet at the same time are always ready to toss it aside and change direction if that's what is needed. Really great facilitators possess a wide repertoire of process tools and come prepared with alternative strategies.

Be Understanding—Facilitators need to understand that there are great pressures on employees in today's workplace and that antagonistic or cynical behaviors may be a result of high stress levels.

Be Alert—Accomplished facilitators are expert people watchers. They pay careful attention to group dynamics and notice what's going on at all times. They are attuned to noticing both how people interact and how well they're achieving the task.

Be Firm—Good facilitation is not a passive activity, but one that calls for substantial assertiveness. Facilitators should always be ready to step in and redirect an ineffective process.

Be Unobtrusive—The facilitator should do as little talking as possible. The participants should be doing all of the talking. The facilitator says only enough to give instructions, stop arguments, keep things on track and sum up. Trying to be the center of attention or make yourself look important is a misuse of your position.

Facilitating should be an egoless activity. The purpose is to make the group succeed, not to make you look really important and clever. An effective facilitator will leave a group convinced that "We did it ourselves!"

Facilitation Cue Card

To start a facilitation

- welcome participants
- introduce members
- explain your role
- clarify session goal
- ratify agenda
- explain the process
- set time frames
- appoint time keeper and minute taker
- start the discussion

Remember to:

- stay neutral
- listen actively
- ask questions
- paraphrase continuously
- maintain focus
- synthesize ideas
- provide summaries

During a facilitation

- check the purpose for clarity
- check the process for effectiveness
- check the pace:
Too fast/too slow?
- take members' pulse
- summarize periodically

Manage conflict by:

1. Venting feelings:
 - listen
 - empathize
 - clarify
2. Resolving the issue:
take a problem-solving approach and end with clear action steps

To end a facilitation

- help members make a clear statement of what was decided
- develop actionable steps with dates and names
- round up leftover items
- help create next agenda
- clarify follow-up process
- evaluate the session

Tool kit

Visioning
Brainstorming
Force-Field Analysis
Multi-Voting
Root Cause Analysis
Decision Grids
Troubleshooting
Systematic Problem-Solving

Be Soft on People—Hard on Issues!

Core Practices Observation Sheet



Facilitator:

Behaviors that help

- listens actively
- maintains eye contact
- helps identify needs
- gets buy-in
- surfaces concerns
- defines problems
- brings everyone into the discussion
- uses good body language and intonation
- paraphrases continuously
- accepts and uses feedback
- checks time and pace
- provides useful feedback
- monitors and adjusts the process
- asks relevant, probing questions
- keeps an open attitude
- stays neutral
- offers helpful suggestions
- is optimistic and positive
- manages conflict well
- takes a problem-solving approach
- stays focused on process
- ping-pongs ideas around
- makes accurate notes that reflect the discussion
- effectively uses humor
- looks calm and pleasant
- is flexible about changing the approach used
- skillfully summarizes what is said
- knows when to stop

Behaviors that hinder

- is oblivious to group needs
- no follow-up on concerns
- poor listening
- strays into content
- loses track of key ideas
- makes poor notes
- ignores conflicts
- provides no alternatives for structuring the discussion
- gets defensive
- doesn't paraphrase enough
- lets a few people dominate
- never checks how it's going
- is the center of attention
- lets the group get sidetracked
- projects a poor image
- uses negative or sarcastic tone
- talks too much
- puts people down
- doesn't know when to stop

Additional Observations:

Process Flow Observation Sheet



Facilitator:

- Clarifies the purpose
- Creates buy-in if needed
- Checks assumptions
- Makes sure there are norms
- Establishes the process
- Sets time frames
- Stays neutral and objective
- Paraphrases continuously
- Acts lively and positively
- Makes clear notes
- Asks good probing questions
- Makes helpful suggestions
- Encourages participation
- Addresses conflict
- Sets a good pace
- Checks the process
- Moves smoothly to new topics
- Makes clear and timely summaries
- Knows when to stop

Facilitation Skill Levels

Mastering the art of neutrality, keeping notes and asking questions at meetings is not all there is to facilitating. Being a true facilitator means developing your competency at four distinct levels.

Review the skills needed at each of the four levels described below. Then complete the facilitation skills and needs assessment instrument that follows to identify your current strengths and future training needs.

Level 1

Understanding concepts, values and beliefs; use of facilitative behaviors such as active listening, paraphrasing, questioning, summarizing; managing time; encouraging participation; keeping clear and accurate notes; using basic tools like problem solving and action planning.

Level 2

Mastering process tools; designing meetings; skilled at using the right decision-making method, achieving consensus and getting true closure; handling feedback activities and conducting process checks; using exit surveys; good at managing meetings in an effective manner; able to help a group set goals and objectives that are measurable; skilled at checking assumptions and challenging ideas.

Level 3

Skilled at managing conflict and making immediate interventions; able to deal with resistance and personal attacks; making design changes on the spot; sizing up a group and using the right strategies for its developmental stage; managing survey feedback exercises; able to design and conduct interviews and focus groups; design and implement surveys; consolidating ideas from a mass of information into coherent summaries.

Level 4

Design and implement process interventions in response to complex organizational issues; use tools to promote process improvement, customer intimacy and overall organizational effectiveness; able to support teams in the various stages of team development.

Facilitation Skills Self-Assessment

Assess your *current* skill levels by rating yourself according to the basic skill areas outlined below.

Rank your *current* skill level using the five-point scale below.

| | | | | |
|----------------|---|-------------|---|---------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| skills lacking | | some skills | | total mastery |

Level 1



Rating

1. Understand the concepts, values and beliefs of facilitation _____
2. Skilled at active listening, paraphrasing, questioning and summarizing key points _____
3. Able to manage time and maintain a good pace _____
4. Armed with techniques for getting active participation and generating ideas _____
5. Keep clear and accurate notes that reflect what participants have said _____
6. Familiar with the basic tools of systematic problem solving, brainstorming and force-field analysis _____

Level 2

1. Knowledge of a wide range of procedural tools essential for structuring group discussions _____
2. Able to design meetings using a broad set of process tools _____
3. Knowledge of the six main decision-making approaches _____
4. Skilled at achieving consensus and gaining closure _____
5. Skilled at using feedback processes. Able to hear and accept personal feedback _____
6. Able to set goals and objectives that are measurable _____
7. Able to ask good probing questions that challenge own and others' assumptions in a non-threatening way _____
8. Able to stop the action and check on how things are going _____
9. Able to use exit surveys to improve performance _____
10. Able to manage meetings in an orderly and effective manner _____

Level 3

1. Able to manage conflict between participants and remain composed _____
2. Able to make quick and effective interventions _____
3. Able to deal with resistance non-defensively _____
4. Skilled at dealing with personal attacks _____

- 5. Able to redesign meeting processes on the spot _____
- 6. Able to size up a group and use the right strategies for their developmental stage _____
- 7. Able to implement survey feedback exercises _____
- 8. Able to design and conduct interviews and focus groups _____
- 9. Knowledgeable about survey design and questionnaire development _____
- 10. Able to integrate and consolidate ideas from a mass of information and create coherent summaries _____

Level 4

- 1. Able to design and implement process interventions in response to complex organizational issues _____
- 2. Able to facilitate process improvement, customer intimacy and other organization development activities _____
- 3. Able to support teams in their forming, storming and performing stages _____

My current skills (Include all the items you ranked as 4 or 5)

The skills I most need to work on (Choose the ones most immediately important from all the ones ranked as 1 or 2)
