

Facilitation Skills: Developing Facilitative Leadership

Groups that need to make decisions or engage in a planning process often find that using a trained facilitator makes this process more efficient and easier for everyone involved. A good facilitator can keep meetings focused on the subject of discussion or on dealing with the problem at hand; remind participants to consider the broader context of the issues; provide a neutral perspective and manage the process; move meetings along in a timely manner; help the group achieve useful meeting outcomes; and give the group a sense of accomplishment.

Responsibilities of a Facilitator

Some of the key responsibilities of a facilitator include the following:

- Helping the group clarify its goals or desired outcomes.
- Helping group members use the same tool at the same time on the same problem to accomplish its goals or outcomes. Sometimes this involvement means helping the group change directions and redefine its goals and desired outcomes.

The facilitator:

- Does not evaluate ideas
- Helps the group focus its energies on a task
- Suggests methods and procedures
- Protects all members of the group from attack
- Helps find win/win solutions
- Makes sure that everyone has the opportunity to participate.
- Periodically summarizes the group consensus on issues to validate and clarify the progress of the discussion

How Facilitation Differs from Training and Presenting

Training, public presentations, and facilitating share some common behavior and skills and often complement each other; but these are distinctly different developmental activities. Illustrated below are some characteristics of each.

Training	Presenting	Facilitation
Participants are present to learn.	Audience is present to receive prepared remarks.	Participants are members of teams whose mission is to recommend new ideas or improvements.
Objectives are based upon learning.	Objectives are based on what is to be communicated, i.e., sell, inform, motivate, describe.	Objectives are based on process improvements.
Lesson plans are prepared to enhance learning structure.	Presenter's outline structures a logical presentation.	An agenda is used to structure the meeting for effectiveness.
Instructor is a catalyst for learning.	Presenter primarily answers rather than asks questions.	Questions are used to develop individual involvement in the group.
Instructor asks questions to evaluate learning.	Visual aids are use to present data (charts, graphs, tables).	Flip chart is used to record team member's inputs and ideas.
Visual and training aids (tapes, films, cases, roleplays) are used to illustrate learning points.	Data, charts, graphs are used to support messages or recommendations.	Facilitator teaches members to use tools for team problem solving.
Involvement (experiential learning) is used to learn from others' experience and retain interest.	Communication is largely one-way from presenter to audience.	Facilitator manages the meeting structure, not content.
Number of participants varies; usually under 50.	Group can be any size.	Team size is typically 5-15 members.

Suggestions for Facilitators

The bullets below contain some suggestions and tips for facilitators to help prepare them for working with groups.

- Be aware of the physical environment and how it can influence group behavior. You may be able to arrange things to provide for greater participant comfort. Think about such things as room setup, audiovisual needs, food or drink, distances between chairs, etc. If you are setting up the room, try arranging the chairs in a U-shaped semicircle, with the newsprint and the facilitator standing at the open end.
- Orient group to the timeframe and task at the beginning of each session. Make sure everyone understands the purpose of the meeting.
- Explain the product that is expected (e.g., small group key points; group decisions, etc.)
- Develop group ground rules, or norms for operating, and use them. Examples include: We're all colleagues—let's respect each other; It's OK to disagree; Everyone participates, no one dominates; disregard rank/status.
- If you don't have a co-facilitator, select someone to write key points on the flipchart.
- If group is large, use name tents to remember everyone's name. People like being called by their first name.
- Additional Considerations
- Be certain in advance that your sponsor (client, representative) agrees with the purpose and is comfortable with the process.
- Stay focused in the present but know where the group has been and where it needs to be.
- Choose a decisionmaking method BEFORE you need it. Suggest some options that the group could use to get them thinking.
- Remember that people properly disagree. It's probably naive to think that there won't be moments of conflict in your group.
- Call a "pulse check" and check in with the group as to how people are feeling or what they are thinking about at that time. This is good to do when the group seems generally blocked or confused.
- If you have a lead facilitation role, close each session with recognition of the group for a "job well done."

- Role modeling of desirable behavior is important with the recorder, other staff, and the group. Consider the potential impact of such things as a certain meeting location, a social versus a task-oriented agenda, the cultural diversity of attendees, and try to plan accordingly.
- Your own self-development can make a difference. Be aware of your own biases and acknowledge them. Ask yourself where you are in your own development of cultural consciousness.

Effective Communication Skills for Facilitators

Communication skills are critical for a facilitator. How you communicate, aside from the substance of the event, can make a difference in gaining support and moving things along efficiently and effectively. Some skill points for communicating include the following:

- **Active listening:** Be genuinely interested in other people's thoughts and feelings. Listen intently. Make eye contact.
- **Modeling:** Practice behavior that you want reflected back to you. Try to be non-judgmental. Watch your nonverbal messages; remember to have some fun.
- **Summarizing:** Use paraphrasing as a method of clarifying. Check your perceptions with the group. For example: "Please correct me if I'm wrong, but I think Bob and Carmen's comments summarized our last 10 minutes quite well by stating...". It is very important to summarize at the end of key parts of the agenda and at the end of meetings.
- **Focusing attention and pacing:** Keep the group on the topic and focused, using care to limit or reduce repetition. This is one of the facilitator's primary responsibilities. Stay on track!
- **Recognizing progress:** For example: "Nice job! We just brainstormed 36 items in that 4-minute time period."
- **Waiting or Silence:** Remember that sometimes the hardest thing to do is nothing.
- **Scanning/Observing:** Nurture full participation from the group. Watch nonverbal cues in the form of body movement, facial expression, and gesture (may indicate loss of attention, confusion, or discontent)—take a break, change the pace, change the topic, etc.
- **Inclusion:** Make sure everyone has an equal opportunity to participate. Encourage those who have been silent to comment. For example, say in a humorous way: "I'm being rated by my client on the degree to which I get everyone to talk!"

Body Language and Facilitation

While we generally think of verbal skills as the most important facilitation skill, the role of nonverbal cues or body language is also critical to facilitative leadership. In a meeting, these nonverbal messages are constantly flowing from team member to facilitator and vice versa.

The experienced facilitator will be careful not to send out nonverbal cues or body language that can be interpreted as negative by the receiving audience. For example, standing up leaning against a wall with your arms crossed tends to suggest a closed mind or inattentiveness. This type of body language subtly inhibits the free flow of communication.

Facilitators must also be keenly aware of the nonverbal cues given off by team members with whom they are working. Such cues can often be important indicators to test the pulse of the meeting.

Group Process Techniques

There are a number of ways that facilitators can work with groups to generate and process ideas and decisions. Some of the more common are shown below:

Brainstorming

Procedure: Clarify the question or topic to be brainstormed. Set a time limit. Review the rules (post them?).

Quantity, not quality, is the goal

Defer all judgment until the process is over

You are encouraged to further other people's ideas

All ideas are recorded

This is a good all-purpose technique for generating a variety of options or alternatives.

Response rounds

Procedure: Give the group members a task/question to work on individually. Ask members to respond one at a time. People are allowed to pass. Record responses. Repeat until people run out of responses. Summarize each round of responses if it seems appropriate. This is good to use if you expect a moderately high level of conflict to exist when the group discusses a particular topic. It is also helpful when the majority of members share the same general opinion, or when quieter members are being pushed out of the discussion.

Subgroups

Procedure: When facilitating a large group (e.g., 20 + people), to enable more of the members to talk, it helps to break the group into subgroups of 2-5 people. Give them a clear question or task (e.g., "How can a program avoid volunteer burnout?"). Set a time limit and ask subgroups to self-assign a spokesperson and recorder. Plan time for each group to report to the whole group using a spokesperson. Post the subgroups' work or records when the whole group reconvenes. The whole group can do such things as pick out commonalities, pick out uncommon items, or circle its favorite one (two, etc.). This is useful in situations that would benefit from small group discussion and creative energy. This is a good way to keep a group stimulated because you get more members talking more in subgroups.

Force field analysis (or "helps and hindrances")

Force field analysis is a technique originally developed by Kurt Lewin. It involves identifying the forces or factors that either help or hinder accomplishment of goals.

Goal or Problem Statement: _____

Restraining Forces	Supporting Forces
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Procedure: Group members begin by brainstorming or making lists of factors or forces that help or hinder their stated goal. This technique allows for the group to see what factors could support them and those that need to be hurdled in reaching their goal. Supporting forces are meant to be reinforced. Restraining forces are meant to be reduced, dealt with, or eliminated. Groups may choose to focus their energy on supporting forces, restraining forces, or both, as a way to move toward their goal.

Handling Difficult Team Members

The question most frequently asked by newly appointed facilitators is how to handle troublesome team members. A companion question is when to confront a troublesome participant.

WHEN to Handle a Difficult Team Member

A participant is designated as troublesome when his or her behavior is directly and negatively impacting the team's productivity or hindering the team's cohesiveness in terms of openness, trust, commitment, and participation.

Most facilitators become alarmed too early about team members' conduct and label some as troublesome. Generally, a facilitator should not be too concerned about an individual's conduct

within the early stages of team formation, especially if the undesirable behaviors occur only occasionally. This initial period may be quite different from later meetings, given the considerable amount of transition that may be taking place.

If the behavior does not subside in an appropriate time period, or is of a severe nature, the facilitator or team leader should take action to address the troublesome member's conduct.

HOW to Handle a Troublesome Team Member

In working with this individual, your goal is to reduce, alter, or eliminate the member's undesirable behaviors without hurting his or her self-esteem or capability to contribute. Thus, you should never verbally scold or embarrass the individual in front of the group or even privately.

Your first opportunity to correct troublesome behavior should be during the meeting. If an individual is dominating the discussion, try, "Helen, you have made several contributions; I want to hear how other group members see this issue." The key is to be direct, but tactful.

A second option is to talk with the person candidly about the behavior in private. For example, if a person is rarely contributing to the discussion, you might approach the team member before the meeting and say, "Chuck, I really need your input on this issue; is there some reason you aren't contributing?"

A third option is to use the team's informal leaders—those members most respected for their knowledge and experience. These "leaders" can help if you ask them to tactfully intervene. Finally, you may wish periodically to ask the team to self-analyze their development and to bring negative team behaviors to the surface for discussion.

Four Common Types of Troublesome Team Members

1. The Mummy

This person will not freely participate in discussions. The motivation might be indifference, an inferiority complex, confusion about the issues or process, or a feeling of superiority.

Facilitator Antidotes:

Be patient.

Use a warm-up exercise; give the Mummy a major role.

Ask direct questions to the person on topics you know he or she has expertise.

Assign these people as subgroup facilitators.

Ask this member if you can help clarify the process or if someone in the group can help clarify the issues.

2. The Windbag

This individual comments too frequently and tends to dominate discussions. He or she also tends to be the first to speak on each issue.

Facilitator Antidotes:

Establish procedures to limit the Windbag's discussion, e.g., "Each of you can comment two times for a total of five minutes on this issue."

Target questions to other members by name.

Use nonverbal signals, e.g., no direct eye contact, focus on another part of meeting room.

Do not assign subgroup leadership roles to person.

3. The Rambler

This individual will often get off track in his remarks, misses the point, or uses far-fetched examples to make a point.

Facilitator Antidotes:

Preface the Rambler's remarks with, "Bill, because of time constraints, give me your short version—twenty words or less."

When he pauses, say, "Thanks Bill, but we do need to get back to the agenda."

Do not assign a subgroup leadership role to this person.

Consider making this individual a recorder, thus neutralizing his remarks.

4. The Homesteader

A person who takes an initial position and is highly reluctant to budge or consider other viable alternatives.

Facilitator Antidotes:

Apply "hints" on consensus building.

Overwhelm with facts.

Enlist support of team members.

Give the Homesteader a graceful way out with an alternative.

Reluctant Team Members

An often-asked question is what to do about employees who do not want to be on a team. We advise that you not force involvement, but rather allow the dynamics of the team process and the excitement of other team members to arouse their interest and motivate them to fully participate in the team concept.

Personal Attributes of the Cultural Diversity Facilitator

- Tolerance of ambiguity: able to change to address staff composition, learner characteristics, design features, learning dynamics.
- Cognitive and behavioral flexibility: able to adjust their expectations and learning activities as the diverse needs, learning styles, and responses to training activities become manifest.
- Personal self-awareness: confident in their own identity and possess a high level of self awareness; open and honest in their relationships with students, and effectively help them deal with the issues of culture learning.
- Cultural self-awareness: understand the role of culture in the formation of one's own values, beliefs, patterns of behavior, and the like; awareness of one's own uniqueness as well as one's similarity to the prevailing cultural norms; aware in this cultural sense and will be able to teach this concept to others.
- Patience: patient with learners, whose style and pace in acquiring key concepts and skills may not be congruent with the trainer's expectations; encourage learners to be patient with respect to becoming proficient so they don't become discouraged when their progress seems slow.
- Enthusiasm and commitment: communicate a sense of enthusiasm for their subject matter and a spirit of commitment to the pursuit of cross-cultural learning in spite of the many challenges; able to motivate learners by means of their own demonstrable enthusiasm and commitment to the culture learning experience.
- Interpersonal sensitivity and relations: very adept at interpersonal relations and especially sensitive to the needs and concerns of learners; must be able to relate well to the wide variety of individuals who comprise the learner community; must be skilled at working with other trainers and resource people.
- Tolerance of differences.
- Openness to new experiences and peoples: authentic openness to new experiences and peoples; will communicate that openness to learners in patterns of thought, feeling, and action.

- Empathy: ability to project oneself into the mind, feelings, and role of another; have the capacity to sense how the learner is doing and to respond appropriately; appreciate the learner's anxieties and difficulties as well as sense of accomplishment.
- Sense of humility: real respect for the complexities, challenges, and uncertainties of cross-cultural learning; will appreciate that training is not a perfect science; that creativity in orientation design and technique is still possible and desirable; a deep respect for the intricate and varied nature of cultures.
- Sense of humor: able to laugh at themselves and at peculiarities of cross-cultural relationships.

Active Listening Skills

- Maintain good eye contact
- Face the person or group head on
- Keep an open posture—don't cross arms
- Stay relaxed in your overall manner—this shows you are comfortable with the situation
- Be aware of body language and nonverbal behavior
- Listen for feeling as well as content—what is "between the lines"
- Don't confuse content and delivery—assume the person has something to say even if she or he is having trouble saying it
- Listen for the main thought or idea, rather than trying to memorize every word
- Cultivate empathy—try to put yourself in his or her place
- Refrain from evaluating what is being said
- Don't jump in the conversation too soon—let the person finish what they're saying
- Pause a few seconds before giving feedback or answering a question—take time to think about that was said
- Give the person time to correct an obvious mistake—this shows respect
- Show encouragement. Use simple gestures or phrases to show you are listening, e.g., say "Uh-huh;" nod your head
- Show support. Say, "That's good; anyone else having anything to add?"

- Don't let the person ramble—try to help them come to their main point
- Don't turn an implication you've picked up in the conversation into a conclusion—proceed gradually
- Paraphrase or summarize what the person has said, and get agreement that you've understood completely
- Ask questions beginning with the words "what" and "how" (open-ended questions). Avoid questions that can be answered with a yes or no
- Don't "jump ahead" to complete the person's sentence—you are making an assumption that maybe incorrect
- Be aware of your own emotional response to what you are hearing—it will affect how well you understand and can respond
- Focus your energy and attention on what is being said to you—not on what you want to say next

Facilitator Moments:

Put on your facilitator's hat, then try to finish as many of these sentence as you can.

When one group member seems to do most of the talking, I might...

When an individual is silent for a long period of time, I could...

When someone in the team "puts down" another member, I might...

When a group seems to want to reach a decision, but appears unable to, I might...

When someone comes late, I might...

When group members are excessively polite and unwilling to confront each other's ideas, I might...

Resources

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