

Facilitation

Helping people work together in groups and teams to
achieve their goals

Expert knowledge means success



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Note: This publication has not been updated since it was last published. Some of the hyperlinks may have changed and may need updating. In addition, some of the information in this publication may be out of date.

Introduction

What is facilitation? It simply means "to make easy." When it's applied to businesses and organisations, facilitation means helping people work together in groups and teams to achieve their objectives.

Teams

Although most teams start out unable to work together effectively, this can be overcome with facilitation. Teams are groups of people who share a common purpose, who depend on each other to achieve that purpose, develop relationships with each other and outsiders and eventually develop roles within the team. Different types of teams require different teambuilding techniques.

Organisations often use teams as a solution for all kinds of tasks, including many when it is really better to work alone.

What is Facilitation?¹

People depend on groups or teams to do what they cannot accomplish as individuals. At the heart of improving group effectiveness is the ability of group members to reflect on what they are doing, in order to create the conditions necessary to more effectively achieve their goals.

Facilitation is a process by which a substantially neutral person, acceptable to all members of the group, and with no decision-making authority, works with a group to improve the way it both identifies and solves problems and makes decisions, in order to improve its effectiveness.

In order to maintain the group's autonomy and develop its long-term effectiveness, the facilitator's interventions should progressively decrease the group's dependence on the facilitator.

The main belief in facilitation is that full co-operation between team members is both possible and desirable. Values of equality, shared decision-making, equal opportunity,

power sharing and personal opportunity and personal responsibility are basic to full co-operation.

Facilitators

Facilitators are expert at helping teams and organisations to reach their goals. Whether it is helping an executive team complete a strategic plan, guiding a group through a team-building exercise, or assisting individuals to resolve conflicts, facilitation is a skill that is becoming more and more important in organisations everywhere.

Leaders and managers recognise that the best decisions are those are greeted with maximum acceptance, if not enthusiasm, from those expected to put them into effect. A facilitator can help groups to make appropriate decisions that are widely accepted by:

- Fostering a high level of participation by all affected team members;
- Creating an open atmosphere; and
- Helping a group work through conflict as well as exploring different possibilities and opportunities.

Often, the mere presence of an independent facilitator lifts a great weight off the traditional process leaders such chief executives or chairmen - freed from sole responsibility for leading the meeting process, group leaders can then focus on the agenda content and participate more fully in the process of decision-making.

Typical situations in which the services of a facilitator could be helpful include:

- Creating effective strategic plans;
- Generating new ideas through playing an entrepreneurial role, and identifying opportunities to deliver collaborative projects;
- Building consensus - strengthening common vision and commitment to the corporate objectives;
- Building energised team;
- Creating a learning organisation;
- Creating opportunities for learning and working together by focusing on positive actions and behaviours;
- Using problem-solving methods to help people to work out solutions to difficulties and challenges - including understanding and accepting organisational change;
- Project planning;



- Meetings requiring maximum participation encouraging people to participate and make suggestions;
- Training sessions;
- Assessing areas of risk.
- Confirming progress and completion of tasks.

The facilitator's role is to help the work group improve its process in a manner consistent with valid information, free and informed choice, and internal commitment by group members to the choices they are making. To achieve these objectives, facilitators need a variety of skills and abilities.

Some of the principle roles of the facilitator are those of teacher, guide, coach and leader. As a teacher, the facilitator shows how things are done. As a guide, the facilitator provides sage and appropriate advice. As a coach, the facilitator provides direct instruction to fine tune individual performance. Finally, as a leader, the facilitator leads by example, exemplifying the values of the organisation and the team.

The ability to facilitate is an art. It demands high levels of awareness from those who wish to facilitate. The competency of the manager as facilitator is measured in the ability to do all of the above and to facilitate others to do the same. The following list indicates some of the facilitator's personal attributes:

- Being patient;
- Able to develop the trust of group members;
- Accurately listening to, observing and remembering behaviour and conversation;
- Communicating clearly;
- Helping group members to communicate between themselves;
- Understanding multiple different perspectives;
- Analysing different issues;
- Identifying assumptions;
- Handling conflict easily and encouraging it to be expressed openly and honestly, but without malice;
- Diagnosing and intervening on effective and ineffective behaviour;
- Offering feedback without creating defensive reactions;
- Accepting feedback (and criticism) without reacting defensively;
- Empathising with team members;
- Being supportive and encouraging;
- Being flexible and staying alert;

The function of facilitation is to keep a meeting focused and moving, and to ensure across-the-group participation. The facilitator makes sure these things occur, either by doing it or by monitoring the group and intervening as needed. The facilitator is the keeper of the task and doesn't influence the content or product of the group. The facilitator pays attention to the way the group works - the process.

Sometimes, the facilitator acts as a resource to the group in the area of data analysis tools and problem-solving techniques. The facilitator must be comfortable with team building techniques and group process in order to assist the group in performing tasks and maintenance roles essential to team building. The facilitator intervenes to help the group stay focused and build cohesiveness, getting the job done with excellence, while developing the product.

To keep the meeting on track, the facilitator must remain aware of the agenda, the time, and the flow of work. Facilitation skills are used to ensure total participation. Facilitators observe group development, noting both task and maintenance roles, and encourage group members to perform them. Facilitators handle inappropriate participant behaviours with skill and sensitivity.

WorkSet – a system for assigning and monitoring jobs

Building effective teams isn't just about recruitment or facilitation. Team building also has a lot to do with how people perceive their jobs and how others perceive them. Someone who's done a lot of work in this area is Dr. R. Meredith Belbin, one of the world's leading gurus on team building – he has developed the BelBin WorkSet – a system for assigning and monitoring jobs... read below about how effective the system is and what it could do for your Team.

The limitations of current procedures for setting up jobs are becoming increasingly recognised. The need for a new approach has come about due to a realisation that the concept of a "Job" is undergoing a profound change. The "Job" and its ally "the Job Specification", with its notion of a fixed

work content, have been described as presenting: *"...rigid solutions to an elastic problem Jobs discourage accountability because they reward people not for getting the necessary work done but for 'doing their job'... Jobs are no longer socially adaptive. That is why they are going the way of the dinosaur"* (from *Jobshift*, William Bridges, Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1994).

The Job Specification is a formula for rigidity. It can become obsolete almost as soon as it is completed. It can lead to wage inflation where "my responsibility has been increased" or, if argument is rejected, over-manning "we'll have to recruit someone to do the extra work".

WorkSet differs from other systems in two ways: it uses colour to denote different aspects of the job and it operates as a two-way form of communication. The Manager sets up the job in four colours and receives information about how the job is being handled in a total of seven colours. That colour extension occurs because the Jobholder sees a different picture from that likely to strike the Manager when the job is set up. A unique system of recording makes the information easy to handle. As information is fed back jobs are realigned and career development opportunities open up as part of the process. A job is a continuous, developing, moving thing.

WorkSet has been tested in three countries and has been adopted for pilot trials by leading organisations in the private and public sector in the UK. A key person in operating the system is the Facilitator. Training courses for Facilitators are available via the Belbin organisation. A computer application will provide an instant analysis of the working culture as it operates in practice rather than in supposition.

The Benefits of WorkSet

- For the manager, Work-Set offers feedback on:
 - How employees utilise their time.
 - How far they are focused on the work assigned to them.
 - To what extent idle time exists or time is being spent unproductively.
 - Whether the "job" has changed, almost imperceptibly, causing changes in working practices.
 - Whether the Jobholder shows signs of bending the job boundaries in ways that imply suitability for other work.
- For the employee, WorkSet offers:
 - Greater freedom in terms of how the job is interpreted.
 - The opportunity to extend or change the frontiers of the job and thereby to assist in personal career development.
 - An invitation to engage in new initiatives in a context in which enterprise can be identified and recognised.
- For the trainer, WorkSet offers:
 - A chance to develop an important new skill as a Facilitator.
 - An opportunity to forge closer links with Line Management.
- For Management as a whole, WorkSet offers:
 - A means of gaining an instant picture of the culture of the workplace.
 - An opportunity to detect cultural changes at an early date.
 - A database for examining fits and misfits in the job.
 - Leads on promising people whose talents and capacities are under-utilized in their current positions.

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Useful Reading Material

The following resources provide further insights into facilitation and how it might help your organisation:



- *The Art of Facilitation: How to create Group Synergy*, by Dale Hunter, Anne Bailey and Bill Taylor, published by Perseus Book Group; ISBN 155561101X.
- *The Essence of Facilitation: Being in Action in Groups*, by Dale Hunter, Anne Bailey and Bill Taylor, published by Tandem Press, ISBN 1 877178 51 9.
- *The Facilitator's Fieldbook: Step-by-Step Procedures*, by Thomas Justice, et al, published by AMACOM; ISBN: 0814470386.
- *Masterful Facilitation: Becoming a Catalyst for Meaningful Change*, by A. Glenn Kiser, published by AMACOM; ISBN 0814403980.
- *The Creative Trainer: Holistic Facilitation Skills for Accelerated Learning*, by Peter Handley, et al, published by McGraw-Hill, ISBN 0077090306.
- *The Training Trilogy: Facilitation Skills*, by Dick Leatherman, published by International Training Consultants, Inc., ISBN 0967432502.
- *The Complete Facilitators' Handbook*, by John Heron, published by Stylus Pub Llc, ISBN 0749429720.
- *Managing Inter@ctively: Executing Business Strategy, Improving Communication, and Creating a Knowledge-Sharing Culture*, by Mary E. Boone, published by McGraw-Hill Professional Publishing, ISBN 0071358668.
- *The Skilled Facilitator - practical wisdom for developing effective groups*, by Roger Schwartz, published by Jossey-Bass Inc, ISBN 1 55542 638 7.

- *Negotiating at an Uneven Table - working with difference and diversity*, by Phyllis Beck Kriteck, published by Jossey-Bass ISBN 0 7879 0254 3.
- *Conflict Mediation Across Cultures*, by David Augsburg, published by Westminster/John Knox, ISBN 0-664-25609-0.
- *Polarity Management - identifying and managing unsolvable problems*, by Barry Johnson, published by HRD Press, ISBN 0 87425 176 1.
- *Collaborating - finding common ground for multiparty problems*, by Barbara Gray, published by Jossey-Bass Publishers, ISBN 1 55542 159 8.
- *Getting Disputes Resolved*, by William Ury, Jeanne Brett & Stephen Goldberg, published by Jossey-Bass ISBN 1 55542 125 3.
- *How to Make Meetings Work*, by Michael Doyle & David Straus, published by Jove Books, ISBN 0 515 09048 4.
- *Facilitating With Ease! A Step-By-Step Guidebook with Customizable Worksheets (on CD-ROM)*, by Ingrid Bens, published by Jossey-Bass, ISBN 0787951943.

Further Information

This guide is for general interest - it is always essential to take advice on specific issues. We believe that the facts are correct as at the date of publication, but there may be certain errors and omissions for which we cannot be responsible.

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Publication issued or updated on: 26 January 2012

Ref: 508



Reference:

- ¹ See: The Art of Facilitation, published by Tandem Press.