

Facilitation



Facilitation is the effective deployment of the processes and tasks needed to run a productive and impartial meeting¹. It serves the needs of any group who are meeting with a common purpose, whether it be making a decision, solving a problem, or simply exchanging ideas and information. Importantly, the facilitator cannot be part of the process! The job of the facilitator is to ensure the meeting or workshop runs effectively, the job of the participants is to make decisions or develop ideas or a consensus.

A facilitator is someone who works with a group of people to formulate and deliver some form of formal²

or informal process to help the group achieve what they want or need to do. This can involve doing developmental intervention in regular meetings, to running workshops, to conducting experience-based training. The facilitator does not lead the group, nor does he/she try to distract or to entertain. The facilitator:

- Remains neutral
- Encourages participation
- Maintains focus on the task
- Protects group members and make sure everyone participates
- Builds trust and fosters relationships
- Works to improve communication and build understanding
- Helps build small agreements
- Manages this process of group decision making.

The Role of the Facilitator

Prior to a meeting, the facilitator should:

- Research the meeting and find out the purpose and goal (if any)
- Establish who needs to attend
- Draw up a draft agenda and design the group processes needed to attain the necessary results
- Share the agenda with potential attendees, changing it as necessary
- Ensure everyone gets fully briefed for the meeting and that everyone knows the purpose and potential consequences of the meeting.

During the meeting, the facilitator should:

- Monitor the agenda and keep time
- Manage the group process and encourage participation from all attendees
- Help participants understand different points of view

¹ For more on *running effective meetings* see: http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1075_Meetings.pdf

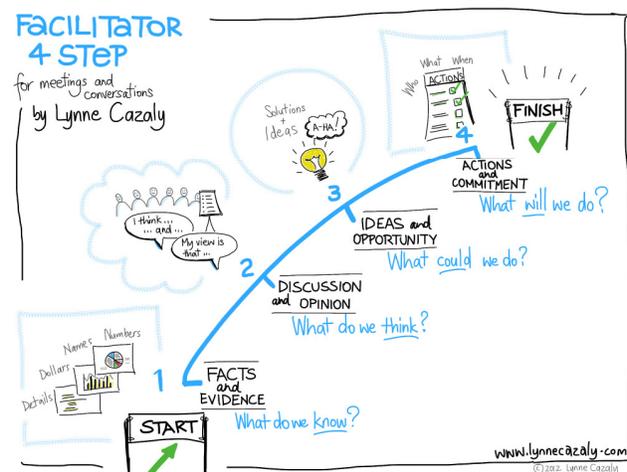
² Formal facilitation may involve *dispute management* processes such as mediation or conciliation. See 'Facilitated Negotiations (page 7)': https://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1024_Negotiating.pdf

- Foster solutions that incorporate diverse points of view
- Manage participant behaviour and create a safe environment
- Teach new thinking skills and facilitate structured thinking activities³
- Record (with an agreed phraseology) agreements. They may also note unresolved issues for later debate.

The facilitator may write up and publish the results of the meeting to everyone concerned including those who could not attend or ensure this occurs.

Facilitation Techniques⁴

- Use ice-breakers to warm up the group
- **Involvement Tips:**
 - Use a Koosh Ball to get participation. The person with the Koosh has the floor. When they are finished speaking, they toss the Koosh to someone else. This allows the team to direct the discussion and prevents interruptions.
 - Have individuals write one question they want answered about the topic of the meeting on a 'Post-It Note'. Then revisit the question at the end of the meeting and have their team mates answer the questions.
 - Have individuals write down their feelings about the team on 'Post-It Note'. Then collect all of the notes and redistribute them. Have team members read and explain the cards based on what they think the writer meant. This allows issues and concerns to be brought forward without fear of punishment.
 - When brainstorming, have team members write their ideas on post-it notes. Then have them post the notes on a wall or flip chart and cluster related notes⁵.
 - Use chips to control talkers. Each person receives 3-5 chips, each worth up to 1 minute of floor time. When you want to speak, you turn in a chip. When chips are gone, you cannot speak.
 - Have each person draw their vision of success for the team (pictures only - no words). Then have others explain the vision.
 - Have each person complete this sentence: "One thing I need to understand on this team is..." Then discuss the answers.
- **Meeting Facilitation Tips:**
 - Use and post an agenda. When discussion strays, use the agenda to bring the group back.
 - Use a "Parking Lot" flip chart - record side issues or those outside of the agenda on a flip chart. At the end of the meeting, determine when those issues will be addressed.
 - When you want to lead the discussion, stand front and centre in the room. When you want the team to lead the discussion, sit or stand to the side of the room.



³ See **Six Thinking Hats** at: https://mosaicprojects.com.au/Mag_Articles/P038_6_Thinking_Hats.pdf

⁴ Sourced from Results Through Training: www.RTTWorks.com

⁵ For more on **brainstorming** see: https://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1068_Data_Gathering.pdf

Changing position sends cues to the team and helps you maintain control.

- Capture minutes and decisions on flip charts during the meeting.
- Set ground rules as a team and review at every meeting.
- **Conflict Management Tips⁶:**
 - Have the team identify the criteria they will use to make a decision. Then evaluate ideas against each criterion.
 - Post each position on a flip chart, with two charts per idea (one pro and one con). Have participants silently post their ideas on the appropriate flip chart. Each idea must be no more than 5 words in length. Each person can spend no more than 1 minute at a flip chart.
 - When two people disagree, ask each to reflect the opposite position using active listening⁷. Continue reflecting until the other person agrees that they fully understand the position.
 - Summarize the issues on which there is agreement and confirm to show progress and possibilities.
 - When there appears to be agreement, confirm with each team member.
 - Look for non-verbal signs of dissent and address them openly.
 - Divide team into two groups. Assign each group either positive conflict behaviours or negative conflict behaviours and have them identify five items on their assigned list. Then have groups act out the behaviours on their list while the other group guesses. Debrief by developing a list of ground rules for conflict on the team.
 - Never take sides. Instead, suggest a way for the team to overcome its roadblock.
- **Tips for Ending a Session:**
 - Ask for one thing each person learned in the session.
 - Revisit action items and assignments and confirm due dates.
 - Develop a game or quiz for the team to see how many questions they can answer correctly about the meeting content. For example, if the meeting was a "get acquainted" meeting for a new team, one question might be: "Which person on your team has been to Graceland three times?"
 - Ask each person to share one action they will take in the next week as a result of the team session.
 - Have each person draw a picture of something they learned in the meeting. Then have others guess what it is.
- **Questions for Getting Feedback on How You're Doing:**
 - What is one thing I could do differently next time in my role as facilitator?
 - What would you like me to be doing that I am not?
 - What could I have done to make this meeting more productive?
 - What should I be doing to make you (the team) self-sufficient (not need me)?
 - What has to happen for you to rate our meetings a "10"?

⁶ For more on **conflict management** see: https://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1041_Managing_Conflict.pdf

⁷ For more on *active listening* see: https://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1012_Active_Listening.pdf



Dealing with difficult people

Unfortunately, it is common to find at least some participants in every facilitated workshop who are not fully committed to its success, or who are not willing to contribute freely. Some of these types, with suggestions to manage them are:

- **Aggressor.** These people do not want to be in the workshop, think it is a waste of time, and actively oppose what the facilitator is trying to achieve. They are often loud, argumentative and critical, and their behaviour distracts others from contributing.
 - *Defuse.* Give them time to make their point (but not too much time), do not argue with them, listen patiently, and use conciliatory language. If necessary speak to them outside the meeting during a break, asking for more tolerance, seeking their active support.
- **Complainer.** Everything is wrong for a complainer, from the room size or temperature to the meeting time and duration, the participants, etc.
 - *Delay.* Listen to their complaints, and acknowledge anything which is valid. Then agree to address concerns outside the meeting or later. Be careful to differentiate genuine issues from perceptions.
- **Know-it-all.** Some people delight in expressing their opinion and demonstrating their expert knowledge of a topic, even when they are not really experts. They have strong opinions and voice them confidently. They are the first to answer every question, often dismissing the views of others as uninformed or naïve.
 - *Defer.* Recognise valid expertise, and play back their opinion so they know they have been heard and appreciated, then extend on their input if possible, building on it to regain the initiative. The Socratic approach⁸ to questioning can be a powerful way to diffuse this type of person.
- **Agreeable.** While agreeable individuals may appear to be the facilitator's friend, they often fail to share their true opinion for fear of upsetting someone or being criticised and are often reluctant to speak first in any debate.
 - *Direct.* Beware of allowing them to get away with "being nice", and challenge them to express their true opinions. Ask them to contribute first from time to time.
- **Negative.** These people disagree on principle with others, seeing it as their role to give the opposing viewpoint (even if they don't believe it). They undermine the facilitator and other participants by casting doubt on the truth or reliability of their inputs, and try to prevent consensus.
 - *Detach.* Maintain a degree of neutrality, do not allow them to get you on their side in criticising others. Accept valid alternative viewpoints, but aim for realistic compromise. Depersonalise their opposition, make it about the process or the principle but not about the person.
- **Staller.** For the staller, there is never enough information to make a firm judgement or to give a clear opinion. They wish to defer everything until later, when more data is available or more progress has been made.
 - *Delegate.* Explore reasons why they are reluctant to offer an opinion on the available data, find out exactly what additional information they require, and give them an action to bring it to the next meeting. Or apply effective decision making processes based on the current data⁹.
- **Silent.** Some people just refuse to contribute. They sit quietly but will not speak up to give their opinion, even when challenged or specifically invited to do so.
 - *Decline.* Refuse to accept non-participation or withdrawal. Ask direct open questions, then wait for an answer, using silence as a motivator. Speak to them privately to encourage participation, if this does not work ask them to leave the meeting.

⁸ For more on the **Socratic approach to questioning** see: https://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1013_Problem_Solving.pdf (page 6)

⁹ For more on **decision making** see: https://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1053_Decision_Making.pdf



There will always be some people in a facilitated workshops who create difficulties, but this is often not deliberate. By understanding the different types of difficult people and having strategies ready to deal with them, the facilitator can ensure that the workshop stays on track and achieves its objectives. Ultimately if someone is not prepared to cooperate, they should be asked to leave – the facilitator’s job is to facilitate an outcome!

Conclusion

Facilitation is a skilled art. Using a facilitator can be very effective in managing difficult situations with teams or stakeholders.



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