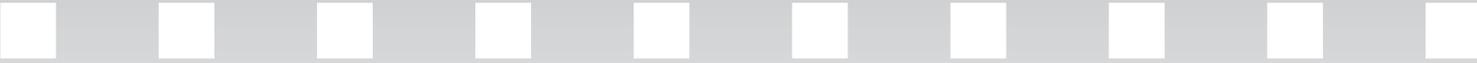




Facilitating Effective Meetings

Utah Continuing
Development Training (CDT)

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Bank Street



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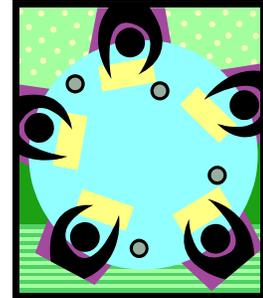
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Facilitation Skills

What is Facilitation?

Facilitation is a way of providing leadership without taking control. The facilitator bridges ideas and perspectives in order to help a group work together effectively and assume responsibility for their own actions and decisions.



When are we Facilitating?

As a facilitator you may be asked to design and lead a variety of interactions. Any interaction, formal or informal, can be seen as a “meeting” in need of a facilitator. Some examples of meetings are:

- A priority setting meeting,
- A strategic planning meeting,
- A team building session,
- A focus group,
- A meeting to share feedback and improve performance.
- A problem solving or conflict resolution meeting,



What does an effective facilitator do?

- Moves a group forward towards its objectives;
- Helps members assess their needs and create plans to meet them;
- Provides a process to help make high-quality decisions and use time effectively;
- Uses consensus to make all members feel included and as if their opinions are important;
- Helps the group communicate effectively by encouraging active listening and understanding;
- Teaches and empowers others to share responsibility;
- Fosters an environment where members enjoy working together and where they are working to attain common goals.



Practices Of An Effective Facilitator



The core practices of an effective facilitator are rooted in the manner, style and behaviors of the facilitators. Regardless of the process chosen, all facilitators need to be continually aware of the core practices of an effective facilitator.

- **Remain Content Neutral**
- **Listen Actively**
- **Asking the Right Questions**
- **Staying On Track**

Remain Content Neutral



Your job as a facilitator is to focus on the process you are leading and avoid the temptation of offering opinions about the topic being discussed. You should use questions and suggestions to move the process along, but you should never impose your opinion upon the group.

Differentiating Between Process and Content

The content of any meeting is what is being discussed. The content is where the energy of the participants should be directed. It is the verbal portion of the meeting and consumes the attention of the participants.

The process is the method, procedure, format, and tools used to achieve the goals of the meeting. The process includes the environment, the dynamics, and the style of interaction. The process is silent and often unnoticed by the participants. The process is the primary responsibility of the facilitator.

The Content – The What	The Process – The How
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The subject being discussed The task at hand The problem being solved The items on the agenda The goal of the meeting The decision needing to be made 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The agreements and expectations The climate and the environment The tools being used The way the group works together The flow of the agenda The way the meeting is kept on track

Remain Content Neutral

One of the toughest challenges as a facilitator is to remain content neutral when you think the group is making a poor decision. You know it is your job to focus on the process and leave the content and the decision making to the group, but you don't want the group to reach a dead end or fail. There are things that you can do to give direction to the conversation without compromising your neutral role.

What are some tips to help you remain neutral?

Ask Questions:

If you have a good idea that you think might help the group you don't need to withhold it. Instead, you should offer the idea in the form of a question. For example, you can ask "What are the benefits of renting vans as a interim strategy to deal with the transportation problem?" The group can then consider your proposal and accept it or reject it as they choose. You have maintained your neutrality because you have merely offered a suggestion in form of a question. You did not tell the group what to do. They have the final say.

Offer Suggestions:

Sometimes you may have a good idea and posing it as a question will not make a strong impact. In this case you may want ask the group to consider a suggestion from you. For example, you could say, "You could always think about renting vans temporarily until your new budget has been approved." This suggestion is still facilitative as long as you have made it sound like an offer, not an order. As long as the members have the decision making power, you have merely only offered another suggestion.

Take Off the Facilitator's Hat:

If the group has not taken any of your gentle hinting and you truly believe the group is about to make a serious mistake, you make need to ask permission to step out of your facilitative role so you can offer advice. You might say: "I need to step out of the role of facilitator for a minute and point out that renting vans is three times more cost-effective than buying them and then not needing them later if your plans change." This role shift is only legitimate if you believe the group is in grave danger of making a major mistake and you absolutely have to help them out. Be careful – a facilitator that shifts out of his or her role often causes confusion and mistrust.

Listen Actively



Listening carefully to the verbal and non-verbal communication of your group allows you to better understand the situation. It also helps create an environment of trust and mutual understanding. Good listening skills are central to good communication and relatively easy to master. However, good listening skills do not always come naturally.

Do's:

- Be Calm and Patient.
- Do not assume you know what the speaker thinks and feels – listen.
- Show warmth through facial expressions and voice.
- Demonstrate you are listening by restating the strongest feelings and most important issues.
- Ask open-ended questions (one at a time).
- Pay close attention to the person and what they are saying.
- Acknowledge you are listening by nodding, smiling, and bridging the ideas of other group members.
- Hold and move your body in ways that acknowledge that you are listening to the

Don'ts

- Don't be designing and preparing your next comment.
- Don't judge until after you have heard and evaluated the entire content of the message.
- Don't try to identify with the person. It will tempt you to launch into your story before they finish theirs.
- Don't try to be a great problem solver by advising. Just listen – you may miss something if you are searching for the right advice.
- Don't placate the speaker by always saying: "Right"... "I know"... "Absolutely."
- Don't dream about other things while someone is speaking. It is easy to pretend you are listening while you are drifting in and out of your fantasies, but it is apparent to the group members.

Asking the Right Questions



The importance of knowing how and when to ask the great probing questions cannot be stressed enough. Effective questioning is the key to effective facilitation. Questions invite participation and get people thinking about the issues from a different perspective. Questions are essential to stimulating a good conversation and for getting feedback from participants.

There are two basic types of questions:

1. Open Ended
2. Closed Ended

Type of Question	Description	Example
Closed Ended	<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 all of the expectations we have just listed?”</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 are some of the things that you expect to get out of this meeting?”</p>

Asking the Right Questions

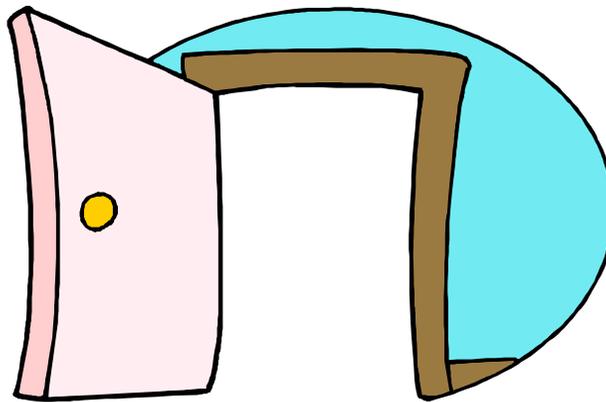
When selecting questions to ask, there is a broad range you can choose from. It is important to understand how each of these types of questions achieves a different type of outcome for a different purpose.

Type of Question	Description	Example
Fact Finding Questions	Targeted at verifiable data such as who, what, where, when, how, and how much. Use them to gather information about the current situation.	“What is the new organizational structure of your organization?” “How many days of training has your team received this year?”
Feeling Finding Questions	Ask subjective information that gets at opinions, feelings, values, and beliefs. They help you understand views, beliefs, and culture.	“How do you feel about the effectiveness of the new organizational structure?” “Do you think your team is prepared?”
Tell Me More Questions	Help you get more information. Encourage the participants to provide more details.	“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. Let you test the limits of the participants’ needs and wants.	“What is the best thing about the new organizational structure?” “What was the worst part of the training you received?”
Third-Party Questions	Help uncover thoughts in an indirect manner Are designed to help people express sensitive issues.	“There is a concern that new organizational structures often create fear and distrust in an organization. Can you relate to that?” “People are more likely to fail when they have not been trained properly. How does that sound to you?”
“Magic Word” Questions	Let you explore people’s true desires. Useful in removing temporary obstacles from a person’s mind.	“If time and money were no obstacle, what type of training would you design for your team?”

Staying On Track

Staying on track is about thinking strategically about your group and how you want to navigate them through the process. Where is the group now? Where does it need to go? What tools will you use to keep the group on topic and to help them reach their goals.

Opening Meetings



Set the Context

- What is the context, or environment, in which this meeting is taking place? What issue brought the meeting to life? Who are the people at the meeting and why have they come? What happened at the last meeting? This is a time for the facilitator to bring everyone at the meeting to the “same page.”

Introduce Your Role

- Who are you? Why are you here? What role will you be playing? Who will be recording? What are you going to be doing and what do you expect from the group members during the meeting?

Introduction of the Group Members

- Have each group member introduce him or herself if the group is a manageable size. Have the group members “check-in.” Consider doing this by asking the participants to share one word about why they are here or how they feel about being here. This will help you gauge the group and give you a general idea of who is in the group.

Review the Objectives, Agenda, and Timeframe for the Meeting

- What is the purpose of this meeting? What will be covered during this meeting? Who will be responsible for each part of the agenda? How long will this meeting be? How long will be spent on each item? Will everyone be here for the entire meeting?

Explain the Process

- What process and tools will you be using to lead the group? How will decisions be made? How will ideas be generated?

Generate Expectations and Agreements

- What does the group expect to accomplish by the end of the meeting? What agreements would the group members like to make in order to reach the expectations?

Explain Logistics

- Where are the bathrooms, water fountain, food, phones, etc.?

Seek Understanding and Agreement

- Does everyone understand and agree to what has been proposed? Are there any questions or comments before beginning?

Staying On Track



Leading the Meeting

The desired end result of the meeting, the sensitivity of the topic at hand, and the culture of the group should determine the way that you decide to lead the core of the meeting. The following are ideas to lead a group according to what is best for the group.

Brainstorming

Have your group come up with as many ideas as possible before they begin critiquing the ideas. Make sure to let the group know that any idea is a good idea. Set up the group to be able to safely generate ideas.

Small Group Dialogue and Reporting-Out

Ask your group to break into smaller groups to discuss a topic. Each group will report the highlights of their discussion to the larger group. The small groups can range from two to eight people. Small group discussion is often more effective and inclusive, especially for those who do not like to speak out in a large group.

Silent Reflection

Have each group member silently write and think about the idea proposed before the group begins brainstorming. Allowing a few minutes for silent reflection allows the more introverted thinkers to get their thoughts together.

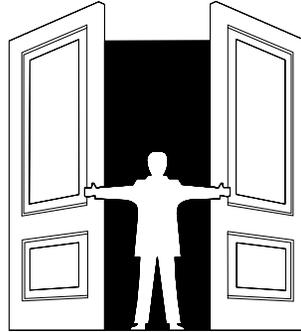
Hat Drawing

Have each group member place an idea or concern into a hat. The facilitator can read the ideas or they can be redistributed among the group members to be read. This also works with post-it-notes on a wall or poster.

Role Playing

Ask the group members to practice a new skill or exhibit differing points of view through play-acting different roles.

Staying On Track



Closing the Meeting

Thinking strategically about how you close a meeting can complete the meeting on an evaluative and reflective note. It can leave the group members feeling they have accomplished something and it can bond the group.

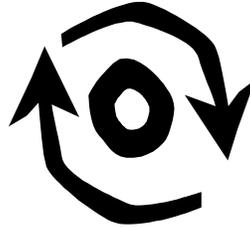
Reflection Tools

- **Key Learnings** – What are the “ah-ha’s” from this discussion or meeting? Have your group share their learnings verbally. It sometimes helps to have them share first in dyads.
- **Journal Writing** – Have members silently reflect on the day.
- **Group Reflection** – Ask the group to reflect as a whole. Ask participants to say a word or create a picture to describe what the experience was like for each of them.

Tools for Evaluation

- **Individual Written Evaluations** – Conduct a formal written evaluation with questions that include space to comment on each part of the meeting.
- **Group Verbal Evaluation** – Conduct a large group feedback session by asking the group members to identify verbally with parts of the meeting that worked and parts that needed improved. (Also known as Plus/Deltas and Pluses and Wishes.)
- **Thumbs-up/Thumbs-Down Evaluation** – Ask the group to evaluate the meeting by casually rating it with their thumbs. This can also be done numerically with fingers.
- **Anonymous Suggestion Box** – Place a box in the room and invite feedback.

The Feedback Cycle



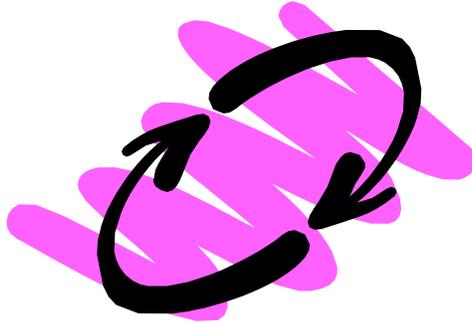
The feedback cycle is a process, which a person goes through in order to gain valuable advice and comments on his or her performance. The feedback cycle is a safe way to improve skills and receive feedback.

Two questions are the foundation of the feedback cycle:

- 1) What did you like?
- 2) What would you do differently next time?

<p>What Worked? What did you like?</p>	<p>What would you do differently next time? What improvements can be made?</p>
<p>The facilitator asks the person who has practiced a skill to state one or two things that s/he did well.</p>	<p>Return to the person who has practiced a skill and ask the person to state ONE thing s/he would do differently next time.</p>
<p>The facilitator asks the group to share a few things they noticed the person doing well.</p>	<p>Ask the group for some feedback on some things the person might do differently next time.</p>
<p>The facilitator gives her/his own feedback about what went well.</p>	<p>The facilitator gives ONE thoughtful comment on an improvement that can be made.</p>
<p>Always end on a positive note by offering a positive comment and thanking the person who practiced in front of the group.</p>	

Giving and Receiving Feedback



When Giving Feedback:

Take responsibility for your role in the feedback process

- Think about what you say and how you say it.
- Think about the appropriate place and time to be giving feedback.
- Listen for clues and pay close attention so your feedback is appropriate.

Protect the person's self-esteem – this is a chance for them to grow

- Use specific examples when giving feedback. Don't generalize.
- Focus on the future. Tell them what you would like to see differently next time, not what they did wrong.
- Demonstrate that you care. Show empathy and sincerity.
- Model receptive behavior by responding well to the feedback you receive.

When Receiving Feedback:

Know your needs

- Do you have the ability to hear the feedback? Are you in a safe place?
- Do you need time to process the feedback before you respond to it?
- Do you need to see things in writing?
- Are the people giving you feedback aware of your boundaries? Is there a process with parameters?

Key Meeting Roles



The Facilitator

Responsibilities:

- To remain content neutral by not contributing, judging or evaluating the ideas generated by the group
- To listen actively to all group members
- To seek agreement and understanding among group members by speaking effectively
- To navigate the way by guiding the process toward desired outcomes
- To seek involvement and participation from everyone
- To help ensure group agreements and time specifications

Introduction:

“I am here to help you reach the goals you set out to reach at this meeting and to help you get through your agenda. I will remain content neutral and not contribute any ideas without your permission to step out of my role. I will make process suggestions and be as helpful as I can. Please feel free to give me feedback if you would like. I am here for you.”

The Recorder

Responsibilities:

- To remain content neutral and not participate in the meeting
- To create a visible, written record of the meeting
- To write down the group’s ideas by using direct quotes and not paraphrasing without permission
- To ask the group to slow down if he or she needs more time

Introduction

“I am here to record what will be taking place at this meeting. I will not contribute my own ideas without first asking permission to step out of my role. Please let me know if I miss something you said or incorrectly write something. This is your meeting. I am here to help you.”

The Group Member

Responsibilities:

- To contribute ideas
- To be open and honest with concerns
- To actively listen to others
- To commit to following the process and working by the agreements



From: How to Make Meetings Work by Michael Doyle and David Straus, Jove Books, New York, New York, 1982.

Facilitation Steps



Brainstorm

Guidelines:

- All ideas are good ideas
- Defer judgment and evaluation
- Use other's ideas to generate more ideas

Purpose:

- To get the group into a creative space
- To create as many ideas as possible
- To generate many ideas in a short time frame

How to Set Up:

- “First, we are going to generate as many ideas as possible. All ideas are equal at this stage. There are no bad ideas.”
- “Let try and generate at least 30 ideas in the next 20 minutes.”

Clarify

Guidelines:

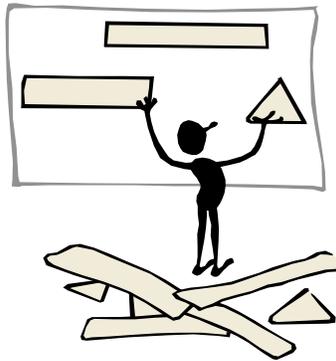
- Read through each idea to make sure the participants have a shared understanding of the idea

Purpose:

- To make sure all of the participants understand each of the ideas before they are asked to make decisions or evaluate the idea

How to Set Up:

- “Please read through the list. This is the time to ask questions or get clarification on any of the ideas you are unsure about.”
- “Do any of these need to be clarified?”



Combine Similar Ideas

Purpose:

- To make sure there is not any duplication
- To group similar ideas together to make the evaluation and decision making process easier.

How to Set Up:

- “Are any of these ideas similar enough that they should be combined or grouped together?”
- “Are there any duplicate ideas up here? Can we agree to have only one of those ideas on the list?”

Prioritize (N/3)

Guidelines:

- Count the number of ideas.
- Divide the total number of ideas by 3.
- The remainder is the number of votes per participant.

Purpose:

- To get an idea of what ideas the group senses are important to consider without making a final decision

How to Set Up:

- “Let’s try and see which ideas the group finds important to explore. There are twelve ideas up here. Twelve divided by 3 is 4. So, each of you will have 4 votes.”
- “OK, How many of you are in support of alternative A?”

Negative Poll

Purpose:

- To be able to focus on the alternatives that the group finds to have the highest priority by eliminating those which have the lowest priority.
- To reach a quick agreement between a few alternatives.

How to Set Up:

- It looks like there is a natural breaking point at the ideas with three votes each. Is anyone opposed to focusing on the ideas with three or more votes?”
- “Is anyone opposed to taking ideas D and H off of the list?”

Finding a Solution

Purpose:

- To facilitate negotiation regarding the ideas
- To facilitate the sharing of different views
- To avoid a situation that is either/or or win/lose

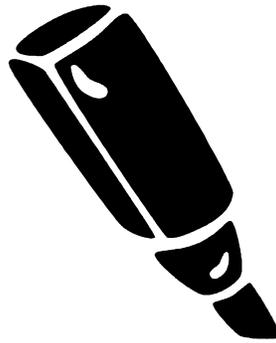
How to Set Up:

- “Can anyone see a way to combine ideas A and B to come to an agreement that everyone would be comfortable with?”
- “What is a creative way that would make it work for everyone?”
- “Do we need to choose between these two ideas? Or can we try both?”



From: How to Make Meetings Work by Michael Doyle and David Straus, Jove Books, New York, New York, 1982.

Recording Skills



Having a skilled recorder document the meeting is very important to the success of the meeting and the success of the work of the group. The following are some tips for recorders to assist them in making posters and charts that are easily read and understood.

Recording Tips:

- ④ Title your posters
- ④ Alternate earth tones (green, blue, purple, brown, black)
- ④ Highlight with light colors (red, pink, yellow, orange)
- ④ Use bullets instead of numbering (*, ●)
- ④ Use abbreviations (like ppl, grps, ldrshp)
- ④ Use symbols for words like money (\$), up (up arrow), down (down arrow)
- ④ Use spacing (white space between items)

