

Facilitation of Events and Brainstorming Processes For Creative and Sustainable Results

Training in Concepts, Methods and Techniques

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Material

Facilitation

I. Core Practices Overview

Regardless of which type of process you're facilitating, all facilitators need to be constantly using the core practices:

Stay neutral on content - your job is to focus on the process role and avoid the temptation of offering opinions about the topic under discussion. You should use questions and suggestions to offer ideas that spring to mind, but never impose opinions on the group.

Listen actively - look people in the eye, use attentive body language and paraphrase what they are saying. Always make eye contact with people while they speak, when paraphrasing what they have just said, and when summarizing their key ideas. Also use eye contact to let people know they can speak next, and to prompt the quiet ones in the crowd to participate.

Ask questions - this is the most important tool you possess. Questions test assumptions, invite participation, gather information, and probe for hidden points. Effective questioning allows you to delve past the symptoms to get at root causes.

Paraphrase to clarify - this involves repeating what people say to make sure they know they are being heard, to let others hear their points a second time, and to clarify key ideas. (i.e. "Are you saying ... ? Am I understanding you to mean ... ?")

Synthesize ideas - don't just record individual ideas of participants. Instead, get people to comment and build on each other's thoughts to ensure that the ideas recorded on the flip chart represent collective thinking. This builds consensus and commitment. (i.e. "Alice, what would you add to Jeff's comments?")

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 the digression if discussion has veered off topic. "Park" all off-topic comments and suggestions on a separate "Parking Lot" sheet posted on a nearby wall, to be dealt with later.

Give and receive feedback - periodically "hold up a mirror" to help the group "see" itself so it can make corrections. (i.e. "Only two people are engaged in this discussion, while three others are reading. What's this telling us we need to do?") Also ask for and accept feedback about the facilitation. (i.e. "Are we making progress? How's the pace? What can I do to be more effective?")

Test assumptions - you need to bring the assumptions people are operating under out into the open and clarify them, so that they are clearly understood by everyone. These assumptions may even need to be challenged before a group can explore new ground. (i.e. "John, on what basis are you making the comment that 'Bob's idea is too narrow in focus'?")

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 - a great facilitator listens attentively to everything that is said, and then offers concise and timely summaries. Summarize when you want to revive a discussion that has ground to a halt, or to end a discussion when things seem to be wrapping up.

Label sidetracks - it's your responsibility to let the group members know when they're off track. They can then decide to pursue the sidetrack, or stop their current discussion and get back to the agenda. (i.e. "We are now discussing something that isn't on our agenda. What does the group want to do?")

Park it - at every meeting, tape a flip chart sheet to a wall to record all sidetrack items. Later, these items can be reviewed for inclusion in a future agenda. "Parking lot" sheets let you capture ideas that may be important later, while staying on track.

Use the spell-check button - most people are nervous enough about writing on flip charts without having to worry that they're spelling every word right. You'll relax everyone by drawing a spell-check button at the top right corner of every flip sheet. Tell participants they "can spell creatively, since pressing the spell-check button automatically eliminates all errors."

2. 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.

- i.e. "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. Usually contain words like think or feel.

- i.e. "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.

- i.e. "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.

- i.e. "What is the best thing about receiving a new computer?"
"What is 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.

- i.e. "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.

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

3. The Eight-Step Feedback Process

Imagine you're at a meeting at which no one is putting the real issues on the table. Everyone is being polite and the problems of the group aren't being resolved. In this situation, the facilitator needs to stop the action and give feedback so the participants can resolve their problems and move on. It's never easy giving direct feedback, so use the right language and follow the steps outlined below:

Step 1: Ask permission to offer feedback

Asking permission lets people tell you if this is a bad time to hear feedback, and ensures that they're ready to pay careful attention. Asking permission is a way of signalling that you intend to give feedback.

"I'm going to stop this meeting now and give you some input that I think you need to hear. Is that OK?"

Step 2: Describe specifically what you are observing

Give a clear and specific description of what you observed. Avoid generalizing, exaggerating or offering emotional accounts.

"During the interviews I held with more than half of you, the issue of some people not pulling their weight was mentioned by everyone as the most serious problem facing this team. We have been talking about team problems for two hours and yet no one has mentioned this issue."

Step 3: Tell them about the direct impacts of their actions

Describe the impact on individuals, the program or the department. Keep it very objective and don't get personal. Avoid blaming. Deal with the facts of the current situation.

"Since the issue of people not pulling their weight has not been mentioned, there's a good chance that these discussions are not going to resolve your most serious team problem."

Step 4: Give the other person(s) an opportunity to explain

Listen actively, using attentive body language and paraphrase key points.

"You're telling me that this problem isn't being discussed because it's too sensitive and people are concerned about offending each other."

Step 5: Draw out ideas from the others

Frame the whole thing as a problem to be solved. Get people to offer their ideas. Remember that people are most likely to implement their own ideas. The more they self prescribe, the better. Support their efforts at self-correction.

"What do you think we could do to make it feel safe enough so that this issue can be discussed? What guidelines will create the comfort we need?"

Step 6: Offer specific suggestions for improvement

Make suggestions that will improve the situation. Wherever possible build on the ideas suggested by others.

"I think the guidelines you have come up with are excellent. I'd like to add a few ideas about how we can tackle this with sensitivity. Would this be OK?"

Step 7: Summarize and express your support

Demoralizing people does not set the stage for improved performance; offering encouragement and ending on an optimistic note does.

"I want to thank you for being willing to tackle this tough subject."

Step 8: Follow up

Make sure you end the feedback discussion with clear action steps. This ensures that the whole exercise doesn't need to be repeated later on.

"I'm going to stop the action in about an hour and check with you to see if we're now tackling our real problems and if the guidelines we set are working."

4. Intervention:

- ⇒ let discussion ramble without proper closure
- ⇒ not know when to stop
- ⇒ be insensitive to cultural diversity issues
- ⇒ use inappropriate humour

5. Facilitation 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
- provides feedback
- 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 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
- looks calm and pleasant
- is flexible about changing the approach used
- skilfully summarizes what is said
- knows when to stop

Observer:

Behaviors that Hinder

- 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
- puts down people
- no paraphrasing
- lets a few people dominate
- never asks "How are we doing?"
- tries to be the center of attention
- lets the group get sidetracked
- projects a poor image
- uses negative or sarcastic tone
- talks too much
- doesn't know when to stop

Additional Observations:

6. Facilitation Process Flow Observation Sheet

Facilitator

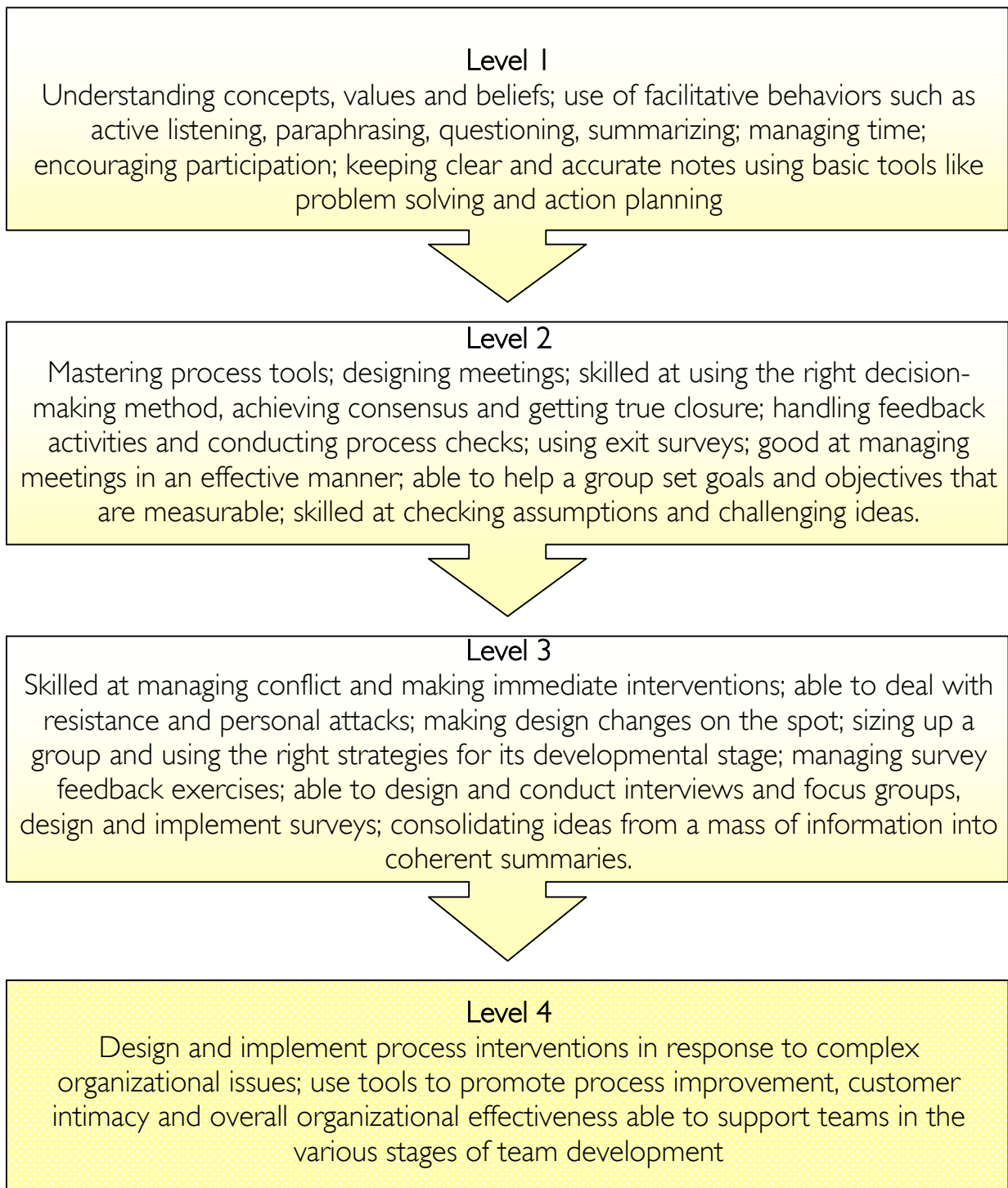
Observer's Comments:

Clarifies the purpose	
Creates buy-in for the proposed challenge	
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	

7. 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.



8. 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 4-point scale below:

1 = no skill 2 = a little skill 3 = good skill level 4 = totally competent

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 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 _____

Rank your *current* skill level using the 4-point scale below:

1 = no skill 2 = a little skill 3 = good skill level 4 = totally competent

Level 3

Rating

- | | |
|--|-------|
| 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 | _____ |

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)



THE WHY-BE-DO WORKSHEET

Note: Completion of this Worksheet will not produce a Why-Be-Do, but it will be a very good start.

DESTINY (WHY I AM HERE ON EARTH)

What, do you believe, are the most serious physical, spiritual, or emotional threats to humanity and our planet (we use the term "Terrathreats") that, unless reversed, endanger our future?

CAUSE (HOW I WILL BE WHILE I AM HERE – WHAT I WILL STAND FOR)

What do you believe in? What are your values? How will you use these to change the world?

CALLING (WHAT I WILL DO AND HOW I WILL USE MY TALENTS AND GIFTS TO SERVE)

What are your greatest talents? What do you love to do so much that it fills your heart with joy? Where do your greatest talents and passion intersect?

Structure of a Future Conference

1. Look at / evaluate the past: **Where do we come from?**

Changes in your own life and in society

2. Look at the presence: **Where are we now?**

What is your present theme, problem, and solution?

3. Look outside and inside

Inside: What makes us strong?

What makes us angry?

Outside: Perspectives of society

4. Look at the future: **What do we want to attain?**

Personal vision

Society vision

5. Finding consensus

Where are similarities?

What do we want to do?

6. Improving Cooperation

7. To Do Plan

The Non-eternal Exercise

1. Write down all your thoughts, what you will do, when you get to know that you will only live for another month?
2. What would you have done differently in your life?
 - ... in your work
 - ... in your society

*I asked Allah/God,
“How much time do I have before I die?”*

*Allah/God replied,
“Enough to make a difference”.*

The Outcome Exercise

Exercise at the beginning of the seminar: Anticipation of seminar success

Please write down a letter to the seminar leader of thanks for the outcome of the 5-day workshop. All your expectations are fulfilled, which ones, all your fears are conquered - you are fully satisfied...

How does that look like?