

Facilitation 101: Roles of Effective Facilitators

Overview: This workshop provides a basic introduction to techniques and tips for facilitation, which are useful for trainings, discussion groups and other formats. It is an introductory workshop, exploring some of the knowledge and skills a facilitator needs to be effective in leading groups. It focuses in particular on presenting the roles of effective facilitation.

Category: Facilitation; communication; leadership skills; project planning; management

Level: Introductory

Type: Structured activities suitable for workshop, retreat, training, and regular meetings

Focus or Goals of this Guide:

- To highlight the critical nature of effective facilitation
- To provide participants with the opportunity to identify those skills associated with effective facilitation
- To have participants learn and practice new facilitation skills
- To provide participants with the opportunity to explore their own facilitation styles and share what they know

Materials:

- Flip Charts or Chalk Board (would need LOTS of chalk board space)
- Markers and tape or Chalk
- Scraps of paper or index cards for the exercise in section 3

Handouts (located at the end of this guide):

- Facilitator To Do/Not To Do List
- Facilitator Responsibilities
- Facilitation Tools

How to Prepare:

- Write the following items on the board or flipcharts
 - Workshop Agenda
 - Definition of Facilitator
 - Responsibilities of a Facilitator
 - Familiarize yourself with the role play scripts
 - Create “role cards” for the role plays
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- Print handouts or, if you have access to a laptop/projector, create slides of the handouts to project onto a screen

How to Do/Brief Outline:

The outline has the following parts:

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|---------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1) Introduction | suggested time 10 minutes |
| 2) Defining Facilitation | suggested time 20 minutes |
| 3) Behaviors of a Facilitator | suggested time 25 minutes |
| 4) Tools | suggested time 10 minutes |
| 5) Practicing Good Facilitation | suggested time 20 minutes |
| 6) Closing | suggested time 5 minutes |

1 Introduction

Suggested time 10 minutes

- Facilitators introduce themselves
- Participants introduce themselves
 - Depending on size of group, have 2-3 participants introduce themselves and share why they chose to attend workshop
- Review agenda
- Have participants raise their hands if they:
 - Have facilitated a meeting before
 - Facilitate meetings regularly (once or twice a month)
 - Facilitate workshops regularly (once or twice a year)
 - Have been in a meeting or workshop that was very poorly facilitated
 - Have been in a meeting or a workshop that was exceptionally well-facilitated

2 Defining Facilitation

Suggested time 20 minutes

- Have participants reflect silently for a moment on the absolute worst meeting/workshop s/he has ever attended
 - Once they have had time to reflect, have participants turn to partner and describe the experience—encourage them to highlight the specific points that made it such a bad experience
 - Have each pair share one aspect of the bad experiences they discussed
 - Repeat activity with the best meeting/workshop
 - *Share that most of the meetings that we go to are fine—there's an agenda, stuff gets decided, etc. But all of the participants were also able to remember at least one occasion where the facilitator was instrumental in creating this great space for ideas and learning and sharing. So for the rest of the session we're going to work on identifying some tools that will empower them to be that person that people think of when they're recalling a great facilitator.*
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- Defining facilitation
 - Refer to definition you have written on the board or flipchart: “The art of leading people through a process toward agreed-upon objectives in a manner that encourages participation, ownership, and productivity from all involved.”
 - *Use the idea of facilitation as art to frame the workshop—facilitation is creative, based on the individual, but also requires skills, tools, and practice*
- Review the responsibilities of a facilitator that you’ve written on the board. A facilitator is responsible for:
 - Setting an agenda
 - Setting goals/Keep the pace
 - Generating ideas/Brainstorming
 - Clarifying/Summarizing points
 - Managing Conflict
 - Managing Personalities/Facilitating appropriate levels of teambuilding
 - Wrapping up/Setting next steps/Ensuring follow up
 - *Note that it’s the facilitator’s responsibility to make sure that these things happen not necessarily to DO all of these things. Delegate when appropriate.*
- Explain that we will also review and practice tools throughout that can aid in achieving the above tasks

3 Behaviors of a Facilitator

Suggested time 25 minutes

After you present the definition of facilitation, use the following skits to involve the audience in an illustration of good and bad facilitation.

Select a group of about four volunteers to participate in the skit. Using index cards, assign them each a role that reflects a particular stance on an issue (i.e. strongly opposed, moderately opposed, strongly in favor, moderately in favor). Explain that you will facilitate a mock meeting during which they will be asked to assume those roles. Explain that everyone else should serve as observers and make a mental note of the facilitators behaviors.

(Also, be sure to remind the group that the scenario is an over-dramatization for the purpose of making a point.)

Sample Topic: Support cell phone use on planes? Yeah or nay

- NOT TO DO Scenario:
 - Tell them we need to make a decision about whether or not to support cell phone use and dive right in
 - “Personally—it’s like I been waiting for this day my whole life; I was in the grocery store the other day and I heard this woman (one of these liberal, bra-burning feminist types right) going on and on about how cell phones are ruining the very fabric of this nation. I was like whatever Rainbow Treehugger—go back to your yert and make some homemade granola. “
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- NOT TO DO: *Impose a solution on the group or push personal agendas and opinions as the “right” answer.*
 - NOT TO DO: *Assume the demographics of your group. (Assumed that the groups were conservatives or anti- feminists.)*
- “But of course I’m open to hearing from everyone. You (call on opponent of issue)—you’re up.” Downplay ideas and cut the person off. “You (call on a supporter of issue) —you’re up.” Praise idea. Allow person a great deal of time to talk.
 - NOT TO DO: *Downplay people’s ideas.*
- “Case in point—remember I was telling you about when I had that bowel issue on the plane that time and I wasn’t sure if it was that bad Chinese food we had in the airport or something else going on down there?...How great would it have been to have a cell phone then.”
 - NOT TO DO: *Tell inappropriate or offensive stories.*
 - NOT TO DO: *Share too much about your personal experience and life.*
- Okay well clearly the yay’s have the strongest argument—I’ll tell the big guys that we’re a go.
 - NOT TO DO: *Take a stance with one section of the group.*
- END SCENE – Acknowledge volunteers.

Have co-facilitator debrief by asking participants to share any bad habits that they noticed from the skit. Record them on a flipchart.

Transition into second skit by choosing a new set of about four volunteers and redistribute the same roles.

Sample Topic: Support cell phone use on planes? Yeah or nay

• TO DO:

- Welcome group and quickly check in by saying “How’s everybody doing today?”
- Explain decision that needs to be made give some background—“I’m hoping that we can make this decision today but what’s most important, of course, is that everyone feels like they can support the position.”
 - Agenda
 - Have you guys spend some time thinking about how you’re feeling about this issue
 - Have an open discussion as a group just to get a sense for individual opinions in the room
 - Then we’ll try to see if we can come to some sort of group decision about this
 - ANYTHING ELSE FOLKS WANT TO ADD TO THE AGENDA?
 - TO DO: *Clearly explain activity directions and be prepared for questions.*
- Ask someone from group volunteer to scribe ideas
- Give participants about 30 seconds to collect their thoughts on the issue of cell phone usage on plans—“Look towards me when you’re ready to start discussing.”
- Hear from 3 people about their ideas.
 - Affirm each idea
 - Solicit input from other participants
- State that you want to get a sense of where everyone stands on the issue given the discussion. Do a “fist to five” to gauge.

- Conclude by asking someone to type up notes for folks who weren't present
- END SCENE – Acknowledge volunteers

Have co-facilitator debrief by asking participants to share any effective habits that they noticed from the skit. Record them on a flipchart.

- Distribute To-do/Not to do handouts
 - Review items not mentioned during the skit debrief

4 Tools

Suggested time 10 minutes

- Explain that there are also “tricks of the trade” associated with good facilitation. Distribute “Tools” handout and give participants a few moments to review the list.
- Ask group to identify which ones were used during the workshop. Choose 3 or 4 additional techniques to highlight or invite participants to ask for an explanation of a particular technique. Whenever possible have other participants explain the technique if they have used it in the past or have seen it used before.
- Ask participants to share additional techniques that they use to facilitate meetings and workshops.

5 Practicing good facilitation skills

Suggested time 20 minutes

- Break participants into groups of 5. Ask for one brave soul in each group to volunteer to serve as the group facilitator and practice some of the skills they have learned. (Recommend that someone with less facilitation experience challenge her/himself to step up.)
- Group task: Each group represents a separate organization and will have 10 minutes to come up with a list of 5 ways that they can show appreciation for their members.
 - Pass out cards that will assign the following roles to the remaining four members of each group:
 - The Naysayer – feels so strongly that his idea is the best that he tries to close down conversation about all other ideas
 - The Chatter – is generally agreeable but dominates the discussion space within the group by talking WAY too much
 - The Silent Type – probably has some good ideas but prefers to remain in the background of conversation

- The Indecisive One – has trouble making up her/his mind so asks lots of questions and can't come to a conclusion about what s/he wants
 - Explain that each group will have 2 or 3 minutes to allow the facilitator to prepare for the meeting and for the participants to get into character.
 - Facilitator should keep in mind some of the skills/techniques reviewed in the workshop but should also incorporate their own facilitation skills
 - Group members should keep a mental “plus/delta” of their facilitator
 - Call time after 10 minutes and give members 5 minutes to offer their feedback to the facilitator
 - Reconvene large group.
 - Have each group share 1-2 plusses that they recognized in their facilitator.
 - Have facilitator talk briefly about their experience facilitating the group, what they think they did well, what they think they need to work on
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5 Closing

Suggested time 5 minutes

- Thank everyone for their participation and ask if there are any remaining questions or comments.
 - Plus/Delta
 - Explain that before you break for the day, you'd like to give everyone the opportunity to offer feedback on how the session went
 - Facilitate Plus/Delta
 - Thank everyone for their candid feedback
 - Explain steps for follow up (i.e. how they can contact you if they have any additional questions; if you collected their email addresses, let them know what sort of information you'll be sending them)
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Facilitation 101: Roles of Effective Facilitators (Handout)

Not To Do List for Facilitators

A facilitator should not:

- Impose a solution on the group. They clarify issues, focus discussions, bring out viewpoints, synthesize differences, and look for underlying agreements. However, this does not mean they impose a solution on the group.
- Downplay people's ideas.
- Push personal agendas and opinions as the "right" answer.
- Dominate the group.
- Say umm, aahh repeatedly.
- Read from a manuscript.
- Tell inappropriate or offensive stories.
- Make up an answer-you never know who is in the room.
- Allow people to bully others in the group.
- Talk a stance with one section of the group.
- Tell too much about your personal experience and life.
- Assume the demographics of your group (based on appearance).

To Do List for Facilitators

- Know the material before doing the workshop.
 - Exude confidence-be clear, enthusiastic, breath!
 - Use humor, stories, and examples that directly relate to their work.
 - Select an appropriate activity that will meet the needs of your group and have lots of fun energizers/icebreakers on hand.
 - Have lots of visually appealing handouts and flip charts
 - Determine needed supplies, room requirements, and chair set-up.
 - Think through the exercise and visualize potential problems and pitfalls- one of the biggest is not allotting enough time for activities.
 - Clearly explain activity directions and be prepared for questions.
 - Observe individual participation and involvement during exercises.
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- Be aware of individuals that may be experiencing discomfort or who are not participating.
- Follow up the exercise with discussion.
- Processing will reveal the thoughts and feelings never expressed previously.
- Be available to talk/debrief with participants during break times and before/after the training.
- Evaluate needs of the group, especially at the end of the day to see what you can change for the next day.
- Evaluate the experience and write down notes for future trainings.

Responsibilities of the Facilitator

Facilitators are the standard-setters for the discussion.

Facilitators must stay focused and alert, interested in the discussion and the learning that is taking place. They create the standards of communications by listening closely, and encouraging all participants to contribute to the group.

Facilitators make the workshop environment a priority.

Everything from how the chairs are set up, candy, quotes on the wall, location of restrooms, and many other logistical items. The facilitator is responsible for gauging the physical environment of the training and how the environment relates to the feeling of the workshop.

Facilitators are mindful of timing issues.

It is easy to over schedule activities and not incorporate enough down time for the participants. Avoid planning intensive activities directly before or after a meal. Always plan for activities taking longer than you think you will last. Facilitators need to constantly check-in with the group to gauge their energy level.

Facilitators are responsible for articulating the purpose of the discussion and its significance to the group.

It is important to clearly state the goal and purpose of each activity and section of the training. Also, let the group know the expected time that will be spent on each activity.

Facilitators make use of various techniques/tools to keep the discussion moving when tension arises or discussion comes to a halt.

The facilitator must be prepared with tools to keep the learning happening.

Facilitators are responsible for paying attention to group behaviors.

Be observant of verbal and non-verbal queues from the group. You can encourage people to explain their behaviors during check-in periods.

Facilitators should be relaxed and have a sense of humor that makes sure discussions are enjoyable as well as educational.

Group discussions can often take a very serious turn and become intense. It is important to remember we do not have to be fired-up or uptight in order to have effective discussions. Laughter and a relaxed environment can be the greatest methods for a good discussion.

Facilitation 101: Tools for Effective Facilitation (Handout)

Tools for: *Setting the Tone*

Working Agreements/ Group Rules: Developing group rules or working agreements helps frame the training and gives everyone a common sense of group norms and expectations. You can start out by asking the group “what agreements would we like to have to ensure a positive learning environment?” Have people list ideas on flip chart paper. Ensure everyone is comfortable with the agreements/rules written down. Then have everyone sign their name to the paper. The facilitator closes by stating, “This is an organizational agreement. We may need to add agreements as the training progresses.” Keep the agreements/rules in a highly visible place. This is useful tool for situations in which the group is not following one of the agreements. (i.e. If one of the agreements was to “start on time” and after meals the majority of the group comes 5 minutes late, the facilitator can then remind the group that they all agreed to start on time and when people are late it breaks one of our working agreements.)

Elicit Expectations of the Group: Before you go into the content of your workshop, ask the participants why they chose to come to this workshop, what do they want to learn, etc.- write methods down on flip chart paper. Then go through each statement and say whether or not that will be covered in the workshop. Be honest, if it will not be covered clearly say why not and that they can get more information from you or direct them to another workshop that may better suit their needs.

Eye Contact: Move towards participants when they are speaking to indicate your interest and respect for what they are saying. Even when you are the person speaking, be sure to maintain good eye contact with your participants at all times. (i.e. Look around the room and make eye contact with each person, while you are talking, for at least 5 seconds.)

Tools for: *Moving Conversation Forward*

Getting the Group’s Attention: Use any of the following methods to reconvene a group or get a group’s attention.

- **Clapping:** Say in a normal speaking voice, “If you can hear my voice clap once, If you can hear my voice clap twice...” and so on until the entire group catches on. Groups typically catch on in three claps or less.
 - **Lights Out:** Flicking the lights on and off is a good, passive way of getting the group’s attention.
 - **Silence:** Standing silently until the group turns its attention to you is another passive way of refocusing a group.
 - **Raising Your Hand:** Raise your hand or use another silent hand signal to indicate that you would like the group’s attention and wait until everyone else raises their hand or returns the hand signal.
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Put up a Parking Lot: Items and questions will come up during a training or meeting that may not be relevant to the content at that particular moment. In order to acknowledge these questions without disrupting the pace of the session, place a piece of flip chart paper on the wall that says “Parking Lot.” In the beginning of the session explain that if a question comes up that would be better suited for a later point in the discussion, they will be placed in the parking lot and the group will return to them later. (Be sure to leave enough time to address these questions!)

Fist to Five Consensus Building: When a group comes to consensus on a matter, it means that everyone in the group can support the decision. They don't all have to think that it is the best decision, but that they all agree they can live with it. To use this technique, the facilitator restates the proposal/idea and asks everyone to show their level of support. Each person responds by showing a fist or a number of fingers that corresponds to their opinion. It is a good idea to post what each finger means so everyone knows exactly what they are representing.

- **Fist-** a no vote. A way to block consensus. “I need to talk more about the proposal and require changes for it to pass.”
- **1 Finger-** “I still need to discuss certain issues and suggest changes that should be made.”
- **2 Fingers-** “I am more comfortable with the proposal but would like to discuss some minor issues.”
- **3 Fingers-** “I'm not in total agreement but feel comfortable to let this decision or proposal pass without further discussion.”
- **4 Fingers-** “I think it's a good idea/decision and will work for it.”
- **5 Fingers-** “It's a great idea and I will be one of the leaders in implementing it.”

If anyone shows fewer than three fingers, he or she should be given the opportunity to state objections, and the team should address these concerns. Teams continue the Fist-to-Five process until they have achieved consensus (a minimum of three fingers or higher) or determine they must move to the next issue.

Prioritizing Your Group's Ideas: Choose one of the following techniques when you need to have your group make a decision based on several options.

- **N/3-** Each participant gets as many votes as the total number of proposal items divided by 3. (i.e. If there are a 30 items on a brainstormed list, each person should identify their top 10 or 30/3.)
- **Assigned Points-** Each participant gets an assigned number of votes and can stack points. (i.e. Each person is given ten points. They can spread these points out to indicate that they support 10 of the ideas on the brainstormed list, or they can assign 5 of their points to one idea, 2 points to another, etc. to show strong support.)

Stacking: When your group is in a discussion and many people have their hands raised, use the technique of stacking. Write the people's names in the order that they raised their hands so they do not have to keep their hands up and you do not have to remember who is next.

Handsignals: Create some handsignals that everyone agrees upon before the training. (i.e. If you need the room to quiet down you would put hold up one hand or clap twice. If you need the person to close their point you would roll you hands in a circle.)

Talking Stick: Avoid having people speak over one another by incorporating some sort of symbolic “talking stick” which gives the floor to only the person holding it. (i.e. Koosh ball, stuffed animal, etc.)

Tools for: *Keeping Participants Engaged*

Design the Training with Various Teaching Methods: No one learns or retains information the same way. Therefore it is important to employ a variety of teaching methods during a workshop or meeting. According to the *National Training Laboratory*, the average person has the following rates of retention for each of these training methods:

- 5% Lecture
- 10% Reading
- 20% Audio-Visual
- 30% Demonstration
- 50% Discussion Group
- 75% Practice by Doing
- 90% Teaching Others

Think, Pair, Share. After you have presented a new idea or concept, have participants take a moment (30 seconds or so) to reflect silently on their own. Next, encourage participants to turn to a neighbor and share their reflection one on one. Finally, reconvene the group and ask a few volunteers to share their paired reflections with the larger group.

Tools for: *Dealing with Challenging Situations*

Responding to Challenging People: It is inevitable that you will face people in the group that challenge you or are block the group’s progress. In general, it is important to address the *behavior* not the *person* when handling a challenge from one or a few individuals. Try to establish responses that you memorize and can access quickly when a situation becomes difficult. Here are a few examples:

Responses to challenging people that you can use:

- ✓ I hear 3 questions. Let’s deal with one question at a time. (then repeat the questions you heard them ask to check for clarity)
- ✓ Thank you for asking. I must not have been clear before. Let me try to explain the concept in a different way.
- ✓ You are very knowledgeable about this topic. Thank you for sharing another perspective.
- ✓ That is an interesting dilemma, perhaps we can discuss this one on one after the workshop.

Stress Relief: At times the discussion can be heated. When this happens have the group sing a funny song, tell some jokes, give back rubs in big circle, take a moment to sit in silence to reflect on other’s comments, or breath deeply to get focused.
