

## **HELPFUL TOOLS, TECHNIQUES & USEFUL INFORMATION FOR THE FACILITATOR**

### **What is Facilitation?**<sup>1</sup>

#### **Overview**

Facilitation is the art of moving a team to a fact-based consensus on workable directions for an organization and on solutions to problems, and then guiding it to effective and timely execution of these solutions. That is a tall order, particularly when you are dealing with a group that is developing a new strategic direction for a group, neighborhood, community, church or region.

Put another way, a facilitator is the lubricant that makes a meeting or a strategic planning process as smooth and effective as possible from start to finish.

Virtually every manager intuitively understands the benefits of facilitation, so it is relatively easy to sell manager-types on using facilitation to expedite a planning process. The key benefits of facilitation is having a neutral, objective expert to design the planning process, run planning meetings, and handle paperwork and documentation. Others who may not have the experience or understanding of a professional facilitator may have a different point of view and may need to see a skilled facilitator in action during this process to understand the benefits.

A skilled facilitator is capable of operating on three skill levels.

First and foremost, a facilitator must have **process skills**. These include knowing how to adapt the planning process to the organization; having the ability to do “stand-up” facilitation, structuring and running all types of planning meetings; having the ability to train people in planning and facilitation; knowledge of business analytical techniques, such as business- and product-portfolio analysis; and knowing where to get outside resources such as trainers and specialized consultants when they are needed.

Second, a facilitator must have **content skills**. Specifically, the facilitator must have specific knowledge that will be useful in facilitating the process they are undertaken. Such skills include knowledge of how the information that is being gathered during the session will be used, as well as the next steps that participants can expect from the process.

This skill set may not be required in every circumstance and in some cases, too much content expertise may compromise the neutrality of the facilitator.

Third, and the most difficult, facilitators must have **intervention skills**. These skills include intervening in team processes that are not working; discussing the organization and personnel requirements of teams and the work to be done during the planning process; and giving personal counseling to others involved in the process.

## Facilitator Tips & Tricks

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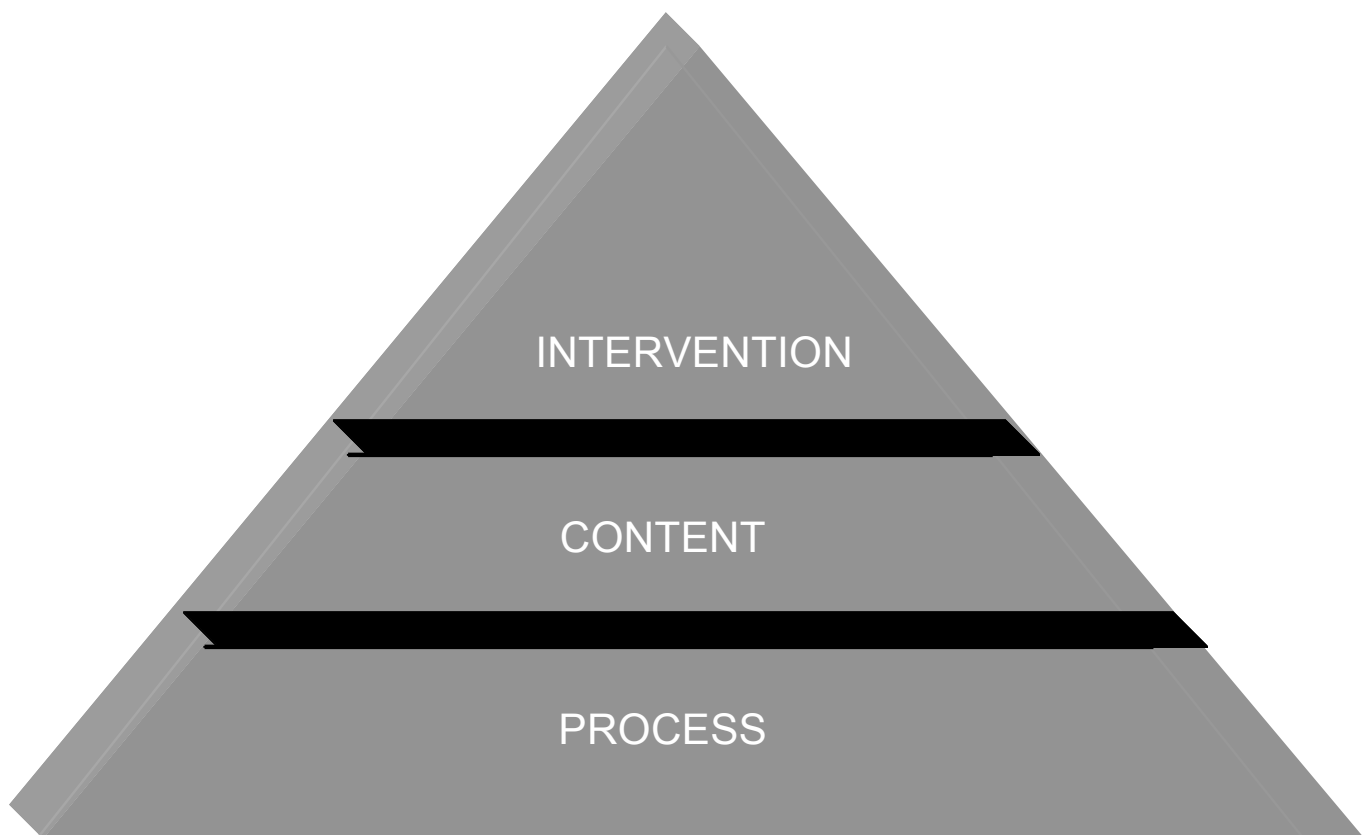
While there are a multitude of skills that a facilitator must have, the basics are:

- Intimate knowledge of the planning process and its structure
- Personal facilitation and meeting-management skills
- Strong interpersonal skills that give the facilitator good working relationships and credibility

### **Benefits of Facilitation**

- Tailored process
- Lower participant frustration
- Paperwork handled by facilitator
- Questions/help
- Smooth, directed meetings
- Neutral, objective party to lead the process
- Better plan
- Plan delivered on time
- Better implementation

### **Types of Facilitation Skills**



## **Key Facilitator Skills**

### **Process Skills**

- Training experience
- Intimate knowledge of the process and its structure
- Superior skills in personal facilitation and meeting management
- Strong interpersonal skills
- Knowledge of diagnostic and analytical techniques
- Understanding of organization behavior and the change process Leadership skills
- Interviewing skills
- Access to resources
- Remain content “neutral”

### **Facilitation and Meeting-Management Skills**

- Carry out stand-up, flexible meeting facilitation
- Build rapport
- Listen
- Probe, question for information, and clarify
- Frame concepts and issues
- Restate and clarify issues
- Frame and resolve conflicts
- Summarize concepts and meeting segments
- Give and receive supportive feedback
- Observe, comment on, and process team and individual effectiveness
- Build trust
- Laugh at self and enjoy appropriate humor

<sup>1</sup> C. Davis Fogg, “Facilitating Team Based Strategic Planning – A Complete Guide to Structuring, Facilitating and Implementing the Process”, American Management Association, 1994, p. 44-57.

### **ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS**

#### ***Meeting Preparation***

- A. Mission Development - What needs to be accomplished?
  - 1. Understand the purpose of the Listening Posts and timeline of the planning process
  - 2. Understand the bishop's intent and direction for the process
  - 3. Be prepared to answer questions and/or be a conduit for questions to be answered
  
- B. Meeting Set Up
  - 1. Room Scheduling Confirmation – call the person affiliated with the room two days in advance of your session(s) if you don't have the information on the session logistics.
  
  - 2. Physical Arrangements – please arrive at the site at least 45 minutes prior to the first session in order to set up the room.  
  
Options:
    - a. Rectangular Tables
    - b. U-shaped Table
    - c. Circular Tables
    - d. Church Pews
    - e. Semi-Circular Arrangement

Your room set up is an important part of the facilitated session, offering a welcome environment. You should have some sort of a “sign in” table near the door. Leave the sign in sheets on that table and be sure that everyone who attends signs one of the sign in sheets.

The room should be set up in such a fashion to accommodate at least 50 people for each session. You may have more or less, depending on the location.

3. Other Necessary Equipment – You will need to have adequate (a total of about 12-18 feet) “blank wall space” in order to display the flipcharts and cards generated by the brainstorming sessions. If the group is large (over 30 people) you will need to have more space because you will need to break up the group into smaller “subgroups” in order to facilitate the session. If the room does not have the ability to move tables around (i.e., your meeting is being held in the sanctuary), you can improvise by using banquet tables for the set up. “Blank wall” space for your session can be created by taking an 8’ banquet table and putting another on top of it (on its side) facing the group. The table that is resting on its side can now be a surface for hanging flipcharts and the “sticky wall.”

4. Getting Started

Please make every effort to start the meeting on time. It is your responsibility at the beginning of the session to encourage people to take their seats. The listening post begins with the opening prayer. After the opening prayer, coordinate with the Pastor of the host church to say JUST A FEW words of welcome and have them introduce you as the facilitator of the event.

5. Housekeeping Details and Refreshments

Each of the sessions is designed to last a maximum of two (2) hours. Determine the location of the restrooms and tell people the location. There will not be a formal break in the program, but people will have the opportunity to move around during the exercises.

The host churches were requested to provide a space only. There was no expectation of refreshments for the meetings, although some churches may opt to do that on their own.

6. Contingency Plans for Emergencies/Unanticipated Problems

There are a variety of things that could become unanticipated problems throughout this process. A little pre-planning could help you as the facilitator deal with those little potential emergencies as they arise.

- **Can't find the location of the meeting** - It is a good idea for you to touch base with the project sponsor (or the contact person) a few days in advance of your session to determine the exact location and who will be there to open the door for you and at what time. Get a cell phone number from them if they have one in the event that something goes wrong and you are late.
- **The room is too small for the crowd of people that gather** – This is a good problem to have, although it creates some logistical concerns. Tables are not necessarily required for these exercises (although they help). If all else fails, set up chairs in rows (theater style) to maximize the number of people you can get in the room.
- **Someone (or ones) in the audience are passionate about one particular topic and want to dominate the discussion** – The format for these exercises actually minimizes that behavior because everyone is given an opportunity to identify at least one element of their vision of the future and to identify action steps and participate in the prioritization. Ask the individual to trust the process and recognize that their issue will get as much attention and respect as every other issue, and the group (and the 120 groups together) will determine the relative priorities given all of the input. If after the session, an individual still feels that they have not been “heard” about the process or the input, give them the name and phone number of a Steering Committee member or Strategy Solutions.
- **One or more participants are very negative** - The format of these exercises again actually minimizes this type of behavior, because it asks people to define their issues or vision or action step in the “positive”. If someone brings up something negative or a negative comment, your role as facilitator is to ask them to “turn that around” into a positive statement of what the vision or action step could or should be. Questions like “*What does this tell us about what the vision of this should be?*” or, “*What is a specific action step that someone could do to improve that situation?*” goes a long way toward turning the situation around.
- **There are too many people for the facilitators to handle in terms of the group exercises** - The best thing to do in this situation is to solicit an interested member of the audience to assist you in recording on flipcharts and sorting and eliminating duplicates with the cards. We will cover this in the training session.

## **MEETING MANAGEMENT**

- A. Tips for Beginning a Meeting – Your energy level & enthusiasm are critical to the success of the facilitation!
- B. Role of the Facilitator - What is Facilitation?
  - 1. Needed Skills
  - 2. Roles
  - 3. Tools of the Trade
  - 4. Practical Techniques
  - 5. Facilitator Dos and Don'ts
- C. Role of the Leader
- D. Role of the Team Members
- E. Role of the Recorder
  - 1. Roles – capture everything EXACTLY as said; no wording changes
  - 2. Tools of the Trade – alternating colors on the flipcharts
  - 3. Practical Techniques – print large & legibly
  - 4. Recorder Dos and Don'ts
- F. Keeping the Group on Task
  - 1. Use of the Parking Lot or Bin
  - 2. Organizational Support

MEETING PREPARATION CHECKLIST		
GROUP	MEETING DATE	
Requirements	Responsibility	Check When Done
1. Schedule Room		
2. Arrangements		
3. Prepare Materials:		
a.		
b.		
c.		
d.		
e.		
4. Prepare Agenda		
5. Send Meeting Notice/Agenda		
6. Arrange/Gather Needed Supplies:		
a. Flip Charts		
b. Tables		
c. Markers (flip chart)		
d. Post-It-Notes		
e. Blue Cloth		
f. Masking Tape		
g. Black Markers		
h. Index cards		
i. Sign in sheets		
j. Spray adhesive		
7. Other		
a.		
b.		
c.		



## **GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE GROUPS**

Source: *The Skilled Facilitator*, by Roger M. Schwarz

### Values Underlying Ground Rules

- ◆ Valid Information
- ◆ Free and Informed Choice
- ◆ Internal Commitment

### **Ground Rules**

1. Test assumptions and inferences
2. Share all relevant information
3. Focus on interests, not positions
4. Be specific-use examples
5. Agree on what important words mean
6. Explain the reasons behind one's statements, questions and actions
7. Disagree openly with any member of the group
8. Make statements, then invite questions
9. Jointly design ways to test disagreements and solutions
10. Discuss non-discussable issues
11. Keep the discussion focused
12. Do not take cheap shots or otherwise distract the group
13. Encourage/expect all members to participate in all phases of the process
14. Exchange relevant information with non-group members
15. Make decisions by consensus
16. Do self-critiques

## LISTENING & COMMUNICATION SKILLS

### Interpersonal Skills Critical to Meeting Facilitation

- Acknowledging the other person's input or point of view
- Listening in depth
- Disagreeing and confronting appropriately
- Turning "fuzzies" into "specifics" for clarity
- Reviewing and summarizing the content and process

### Common Listening Mistakes

#### **Rescuing/Overdoing**

"Shoulds" and "oughts"  
"Why don't you try"  
"Me too"  
Explaining and teaching  
Consoling-"don't worry"  
Distracting  
Leading questions

#### **Victim/Failing**

Withdrawing  
Extended silence  
Taking on their bad feelings  
Little eye contact

#### **Criticizing/Attacking**

Demanding  
Threatening  
Negative judgments  
Name calling  
Stereotyping  
Psychoanalyzing  
Interrupting

#### **Blaming/Rebelling**

"You make me mad"  
"I told you so"  
Sarcasm  
"Gotcha" questions  
Devil's advocate

# Facilitator Tips & Tricks

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## **NON-VERBAL BEHAVIOR**

Appropriate nonverbal is essential for a facilitator. It is important that the facilitator understand that their posture, actions, and nonverbal behavior send specific messages to the group. As a facilitator, please be aware of the effective non-verbal behaviors.

### **Effective Nonverbal Behavior**

<b>Behavior</b>	<b>Rationale</b>
Maintaining good eye contact	Facilitates deeper involvement
Facing the speaker squarely	A basic posture of involvement. It says, "I'm available to listen to you".
Maintaining an "open" posture	Communicates openness to talk/A non-defensive position
Leaning toward the other	A sign of involvement
Remaining relatively relaxed	It says, "I'm at home with you."
Good verbal quality – tone of voice, inflection, emphasis, etc.	Another sign of interest and involvement

## **CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

### **Types of Conflicts**

- **Miscommunication:** A misunderstanding of the other's position or viewpoint. There is actually agreement, but both think there is disagreement due to poor communication or previous assumptions.
- **Operations/procedural:** A disagreement over the right course of action for a given situation. One person may have a preferred way to proceed that differs from the other person's. One says "X"; the other says "Y."
- **Personal/values:** Conflict based on one person believing he or she is being personally attacked or his or her core values/beliefs are being challenged.

## **Steps to Resolve Conflicts**

- 1. Identify, describe, and communicate the conflict**
  - State your position clearly through the use of "I" language
  - Listen and clearly acknowledge the other's position
- 2. Create a common statement of the issue**
  - Is the issue operational or personal?
  - What are areas of agreement?
  - What are areas of disagreement?
- 3. Explore and identify causes**
  - Define each other's goals and priorities\*
  - Explore what is causing the conflict - values, strategy, or methods\*
- 4. Generate and negotiate common solutions**
  - Brainstorm alternatives
  - Identify the other's preferred solutions
  - Negotiate - what must each person do more of, less of, or differently?
- 5. Develop a plan**
  - Decide who, what, when, where, and how
  - Put the plan in writing as needed
  - Schedule follow-up for review

\* The use of open-ended questions and active listening is essential at these points.

## **The Art of “Interventional” Facilitation**

- . used when the process gets “off track”
- . one on one meetings to ask questions and check for understanding
- . facilitator must stay “absolutely neutral”
- . understand the point of view of the “polar” extremes of the issue
- . look for common ground