

Tips & Tricks for Facilitation

Facilitator's Role

The facilitator is responsible for the process of the meeting — how the participants work together. The facilitator should be neutral and non-evaluating. The facilitator should encourage the participants to use the most effective methods for accomplishing their task in the shortest amount of time.

Facilitators:

- Set a positive tone for discussion
- Remain neutral to the issues
- Keep the group focused
- Keep track of time
- Suggest methods and procedures that can help the group work better
- Encourage participation by everyone
- Educate/Inform participants about activities and steps
- Protect ideas from challenge
- Coordinate administrative details
- Record information or supervise its recording

Set the Climate:

Your opening remarks will set the tone of the session. Will the session be structured and formal or will it be friendly and informal? As the facilitator remember to:

- Clarify the purpose and what the expected outcomes of the meeting
- Introduce yourself and the role you will play
- Explain the agenda, ground rules and any handouts
- If comfortable, use an icebreaker or introduction type of activity

Facilitator Intervention

There are different types of facilitator interventions:

Conceptual: Provide an organizing concept, specific technique, series of steps, set of ground rules, or exercise that helps the group accomplish its task.

Prompting: Help prompt, reinforce or clarify already agreed-upon standards or processes.

Process Observations: Heighten a group's awareness of what is happening and point out the implications and consequences of the group's actions.

Evaluative: Use the power of your role as facilitator to reinforce effective behaviors and discourage ineffective ones. These interventions are judgmental and are most useful for establishing norms within the group.

Silence: Not intervening is sometimes useful to build tension or frustration in the group. This might spur the group into redirecting its own actions without the facilitator's help. Best with mature or highly effective groups.

Focus Sessions

There are different styles of focus sessions. Some examples are: the classic session, the round table discussion, and the strategic planning session.

The classic session traditionally involves a large group of individuals who are brought together to discuss a specific topic or issue and provide their ideas. The participants are not given information or questions prior to the session. (However, in some instances preparatory information is preferred.) The participants come to the session fresh with no preconceived concepts. During this session it is hoped that consensus will be reached and that the sponsor/process owner will be able to walk away with an idea of what they need to do from the participants' perspective. These sessions can run from 2-4 hours. The following is an agenda of what a classic session might look like.

- Opening remarks (usually sponsor or process owner)
- Overview (what is the session about)
- Session begins usually with introductions (facilitator)
- Brainstorming in groups (give some brief instruction)
- Multi-voting of issues brainstormed in groups
- Report out
- Nominal Group Technique (whole room)
- Closing Remarks and Evaluation

The roundtable discussion traditionally involves a group of 8-16 individuals. They are usually brought together to talk about a specific issue. In most instances the participants are provided with information before the session so that they can be prepared to discuss particular aspects/questions. These sessions are facilitated, but usually chaired by the process owner or sponsor. Rather than or in addition to using flip charts to record the information note takers (usually 2-3) are in attendance to record information. These sessions can run from 2-4 hours. During this type of session:

- Introduce note takers and explain their role (that they are capturing major items of interest).
- Restate the purpose of this roundtable discussion
- Ensure that participants understand that consensus is not required or needed during this type of session.
- Facilitator's role is to guide the discussion and act as "air traffic manager" during the session.
- Facilitator should encourage everyone to talk. It should be explained that if one person has taken over the session the facilitator will intercede and bring the session back to a group discussion.

At the end of the session a summarization of the major points recorded during the discussion should be reviewed. A prepared copy of the information captured during the session should be provided within one week after the session.

Ground rules:

- One person speaks at a time; no side-bar discussions
- Avoid evaluation or judgment
- Be specific
- Keep discussion focused
- Disagree openly with any member of the group

Focus Session Checklist

The following checklist has just about everything you would need to hold a successful focus session. Not all the items on the list will be needed for every focus session.

1. Define purpose/objective of session
 - What information are we looking for?
 - What do we plan to do with it?
2. Identify who should attend
3. Determine dates of session(s) and where to hold them
4. Draft agenda for session(s)
 - Develop questions
 - Design session format
 - Identify time requirements
5. Clearly define roles/responsibilities for participants
6. Distribute documentation (agenda, confirmation letter) to participants
7. Develop confirmed participation list
8. Assemble session materials
 - Agenda
 - Handouts
 - Feedback sheets
9. Pack supplies for session(s)
 - Markers, pencils, dots, name plates, papers, folders
10. Conduct focus session(s)
11. Compile and analyze session(s) results
12. Create report which summarizes results
23. Create thank you letters and send to participants

Brainstorming

Innovative ideas generated by customers and employees are the lifeline of continuous improvement. While ideas can come to us at any moment, we can stimulate them in what are called “brainstorming” sessions. When you start a brainstorming session clearly state the objectives of the session to all participants. Allow everyone time to write down some ideas (silent brainstorming) before beginning the process. Allow each person to express an idea or thought and ensure that a scribe or recorder is capturing the information on a flipchart. The discussion on each idea should be minimized, but try to encourage others to build on stated ideas.

When using the technique of brainstorming set a time limit, have participants offer ideas when it's their turn, any idea is acceptable, have participants say “pass” if they don't have an idea, and never criticize, question, or even praise other's ideas.

Remember:

- Any idea is acceptable. There are no silly ideas. All ideas should be written down, they are all important.
- Do not criticize or question someone else's ideas.
- Go around the table and provide each participant (including the recorder) the opportunity to present an idea.
- Move quickly - no anecdotes or elaboration.
- After each participant has had a turn, accept ideas from anyone at the table. If a participant cannot think of an idea, he/she should pass.
- Continue this process until the participants feel that they have exhausted all ideas or the allotted time is over.
- Discuss and clarify.

Brainstorming can be done in several ways:

Freewheeling.....a method where everyone contributes ideas spontaneously. The advantage of this method is that it encourages creativity as people build on each other's ideas. The disadvantage is that quiet members of the group may not speak up.

Round Robin.....a method where people take turns presenting their ideas one at a time. The advantage of this method is that all participants get equal chances to speak up and quiet people are more likely to contribute. The disadvantage is that it stifles spontaneity and sometimes members forget their idea by the time their turn arrives.

Slip Method.....a method where everyone puts ideas on a slip of paper and passes it in to the facilitator. The advantage to this method is that some people may be more candid and creative

with anonymity preserved. The disadvantage is not hearing other member's ideas which often triggers add-on creativity

Multi-voting

Multi-voting is a technique for narrowing down a list of ideas or options. It is usually used during focus sessions in conjunction with brainstorming. When participants perceive significant merit in more than one item this technique can be used to quickly identify the most important items on the list. This technique is best suited for use in large groups. It is a valuable technique when there is difficulty in reaching consensus. (Note: It should not be used when trying to reach consensus on a single issue.) Multi-voting allows for each participant to participate equally in the decision making process. This is particularly important in gaining acceptance and buy-in for future actions based on the decision.

Guidelines

- Display the items under consideration on a flipchart, making sure to eliminate duplicates.
- Number the items on the list to facilitate record keeping.
- Give each team member a number of votes equal to approximately one half of the number of items on the list or the number agreed upon by the facilitation staff.
- Have each team member vote for the items he or she believes are most important. Team members may cast all votes for one item, split the votes among several items, or vote for individual items until they use their allotted number of votes. (Some people believe only one vote should be allowed.)
- Tally the votes.
- Select the four to six items that received the highest number of votes. Discuss and rank order the items. If the team cannot establish the top four to six, remove the items having the fewest votes and then conduct another vote.

Explaining Types of Voting

Dots.....participants are each given adhesive dots. One dot is provided for each vote the participant is allocated. If desired, each member can be given different colored dots. Participants stick their dots next to the items on the flipchart that they are voting for.

Show of Hands.....the facilitator asks for a show of hands on each item on the list. Participants track how many times they have voted and are on the honor system to raise their hands only the pre-determined number of times.

Ballots.....The list of items is reproduced on a paper ballot, and team members identify their preferences. This method is the most confidential, and ensures that each member votes the allowed number of times.

Consensus

A consensus decision is not a unanimous vote for an idea, majority vote, or achieving total satisfaction of all team members. Rather, it is an idea every team member:

- substantially agrees represents a common reality;
- sees as a fusion of the information, logic, and feelings expressed;
- is willing to accept; and
- believes is a workable approach that is in the best interest
- of the team.

In short, a team has reached consensus when each member can say “Even though the decision may not be exactly what I want, I can live with and support it.” This does not mean that the entire team must completely agree with the decision but, rather, that everyone is in fundamental agreement. A consensus decision forces a team to consider all aspects of a proposition and hear all opinions as to possible courses of action. Differences of opinion are welcomed in order to obtain additional information, clarify issues, and to enable the team to see better alternatives.

Guidelines

A team leader facilitates consensus using the following steps:

1. Have team members clearly state their positions on an issue and, in good faith, attempt to persuade others to accept their point of view.
2. Conduct discussion and negotiation until all members have expressed their points of view.
3. Call for consensus. All members must say they are at least 80 percent in agreement with the proposition.
4. When the team reaches this level of agreement, all (100 percent of the team) must then commit to support the decision.
5. When this occurs, consensus has been reached.

How to Reach Consensus

A team leader can facilitate the process by:

- stressing the possible;
- defining underlying assumptions so they can be discussed;
- encouraging all members to offer ideas and question the ideas of others;
- avoiding early, quick, and easy agreements or compromises;
- encouraging creative discontent, channeling it toward the issue rather than group members; and
- being careful that meaningful differences are not smoothed over prematurely.