



Facilitation

BASICS



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Facilitation Defined

The Latin root of *facilitate* and the root word *facile* in French both mean *to make easy*. Thus, “facilitation is the process of making it easier for groups to accomplish their tasks” (Haskell & Cyr, 2007, p. 39; Kaner, 2014). A facilitator’s role is to unbiasedly develop and guide groups through participatory processes that assist them in reaching their identified goals and objectives to ultimately becoming more effective in their practice (Kaner, 2014).

Importance of Facilitation

Facilitation can be an effective tool to increase participatory decision-making, which ultimately helps solve complex problems. This encourages and allows space for everyone in the group to share and listen to differing perspectives. A facilitator can help guide groups in a participatory environment to (a) encourage full participation, (b) promote mutual understanding, (c) foster inclusive solutions, and (d) cultivate shared responsibility. Whereas, left without facilitation or a neutral facilitator, groups can stick to their conventional ways of participation. Which often means there is one or a select few dominant thinkers and speakers, the quiet ones often get left behind, differences in opinions are categorized as conflict, unpopular opinions are not encouraged, and people have a hard time listening to others (Kaner, 2014). Without proper facilitation, effective group processes can become difficult quickly rather than *being made easy*.





To Be Successful

When considering facilitative practices, be sure to incorporate these best facilitation practices into the process (Bens, 1999; Haskell & Cyr, 2007; p. 36).

- Carefully assess the needs of the group members
- Probe sensitively into people's feelings
- Create an open and trusting atmosphere
- Help people understand why they are there
- View yourself as a servant of the group's needs
- Make members the center of attention (the facilitator should not be the center of attention)
- Speak in simple and direct language
- Work hard to stay neutral (don't incorporate your thoughts and opinions in the conversation)
- Display energy and appropriate levels of assertiveness (get group back on track when they need to be redirected)
- Champion ideas not personally favored
- Treat all participants as equals
- Stay flexible and ready to change direction if necessary
- Make notes that reflect what participants mean (ask participants to explain further if you don't know what they mean)
- Listen intently to understand totally what is being said (say it back to them, "what I am hearing you say is.....")
- Periodically summarize a complex array of ideas so that they form a coherent summary
- Know how to use a wide range of discussion tools
- Make sure every session ends with clear steps for the next meeting
- Ensure that participants feel ownership for what has been achieved
- End on a positive and optimistic note

Summary

Facilitation can be an effective tool to take groups from conventional methods of conversation and decision-making to developing a dynamic, engaging, and participatory environment of discussion, dialogue, and decision-making. A facilitator who incorporates best facilitation practices makes sure the facilitation process is easy, useful, and produces effective results. Other items to consider when facilitating include is: (a) developing a successful facilitation plan, (b) creating the ideal participatory environment, (c) determining effective group processes, and (e) building a facilitation kit.

Bens, I. (1999). Facilitation at a glance! QPC, Salam, NH.

Haskell, J. E. & Cyr, L. F. (2007). Strengthening your facilitation skills: Level 1 curriculum. University of Maine and United States Department of Agriculture, Orono, ME.

Kaner, S. (2014). Facilitator's guide to participatory decision-making. Jose-Bass, San Francisco, CA.

