FACILITATION AND THE FACILITATOR

EXERCISE MATERIALS, HANDOUTS AND SLIDES

What is a Facilitator?
What does a Facilitator do?

Content (the task at hand)

- Organizes the work of a group.

- Provides structure for a group.

- Ensures that goals are met.

- Uses processes, tools and techniques that can get work accomplished quickly and effectively in a group environment.

Process (how to keep group focused on the task)

- Keeps a group on track.

- Brings out the full potential of working groups.

- Elicits participation from everyone.

- Focuses the energy of a group on a common task.

- Helps resolve conflict.

- Suggests alternative methods and procedures.

- Changes the pace when necessary.

- Protects individuals and their ideas from attack.

- Serves as a neutral steward for the group.

- Uses consensus to help the group make decisions which include all viewpoints.

- Creates a positive environment.

Instructor vs. Facilitator

Instructor	Facilitator
■ Acts as the trainer. ■ Conveys relevant knowledge. ■ Takes control of the classroom. ■ Is the subject matter expert. ■ Helps students acquire new skills and knowledge about the class subject. ■ Acts as a coach who has the game plan, knows what plays need to be taught and what the players need to do to win. ■ Facilitates the learning process while teaching the class.	■ Does not teach any subject. ■ Moves the group along. ■ Provides leadership without taking control. ■ Gets others to assume responsibility and to take the lead. ■ Acts as a referee – watches the action without participating in it, keeps the players on track, but does not lead the team to victory.

What are the traits of a successful Facilitator?

Traits	Explanation	Why it is important
Confidence	• Sure of own abilities • Appears purposeful and in control • Knows own strengths and weaknesses • Knows when to be neutral or assertive • Keeps ego at the door	• Others look to the facilitator for direction and counsel • Minimizes group insecurities • Enhances facilitator's credibility
Communicates effectively	• Articulates and listens well • Expresses self well • Makes specific and concise points • Asks probing questions	• Keeps group on task • Helps the group to understand tasks and requirements • Prevents misinformation • Saves time • Streamlines the process • Enhances own credibility • Helps the group members understand their purpose
Enthusiastic	• Shows appropriate levels of energy, passion and excitement • Displays a positive attitude	• Believes in the process • Wants to lead the group • Builds excitement and enthusiasm within the group • Helps foster a positive environment
Sense of humor	• Brings humor in when climate gets tense • Does not take oneself too seriously	• Eases tension within the group • Helps to calm the group • Makes the facilitator more "human" to the group
Neutrality	• Avoids providing answers for the group • Does not engage in discussions • Remains open minded and impartial	• Helps the group feel ownership in the process • Makes the group members the center of attention • Fosters a safe environment • Enhances the facilitator's credibility

Quality	Explanation	Why it is important
Empathy **Supportive**	• Ability to see a situation as others see it • Treats everyone's opinion equally • Has a genuine desire to help people feel good about their contributions and achieve the desired results • Includes everyone in the discussion • Conveys acceptance to others • Champions ideas from the group even though he/she does not personally agree	• Includes everyone in the discussion • Remains open minded • Helps foster a safe environment for the group
Integrity **Trust**	• Exhibits character and honesty • Is fair • Follows through with word and deed	• Sets an example of proper conduct for the group • Prevents partiality • Enhances facilitator's credibility • Gains respect when group trusts the facilitator's judgment • Group has faith and confidence in the facilitator
Flexibility **Analytical**	• Ability to switch gears at the last moment • Assumes different group roles: leader, supporter, inquisitor, etc. • Thinks quickly and logically; has the ability to analyze comments, understand how they relate to the topic; and develop appropriate responses • Recognizes undertones in the group and uses the positive ones to the group's advantage while diminishing the negative ones	• Keeps the group on track • Helps the group reach its goal • Permits the group to rely on the facilitator for direction • Knows when to stop discussions, move on, etc. • Enhances the facilitator's credibility

What makes a successful Facilitator? Skills of a Successful Facilitator

(adapted from *Facilitating with Ease!* By Ingrid Bens)

Core Practice	Reason for Success
Stay neutral on content	• focuses on the process role • never imposes personal opinions on the group
Listen actively	• makes eye contact when others are speaking; allows others to speak; encourages participation • uses attentive body language • paraphrases what others say
Ask questions	• most important tool • tests assumptions, invites participation, gathers information and probes for hidden points • delves past the symptoms to get at root causes
Paraphrase to clarify	• repeats what people say to make sure they know they are being heard • lets others hear their points a second time • clarifies key ideas • confirms speakers intention • (i.e., *"Are you saying…? Am I understanding you to mean…?"*)
Synthesize ideas	• understands and reinforces the individual ideas of the participants • gets the group to comment and build on each other's thoughts • ensures that the ideas recorded on the flip chart represent collective thinking • (i.e., *"Alice, what would you add to Jeff's comments?"*)
Stay on track	• sets time guidelines for each discussion • appoints a time keeper inside the group to use a timer and call out milestones • points out a digression if the discussion has veered off the topic
Give and receive feedback	• periodically "holds up a mirror" to help the group "see" itself so it can make corrections • asks for and accepts feedback about the facilitation • (i.e., *"Are we making progress? How's the pace? What can I do to be more effective?"*)

Core Practice	Reason for Success
Test assumptions	• brings assumptions people are operating under out into the open and clarifies them • makes sure assumptions are clearly understood by everyone • challenges the group so it 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	• keeps track of emerging ideas and final decisions • makes clear and accurate summaries on a flipchart or electronic board so everyone can see the notes • takes brief and concise notes • records what was actually said
Summarize clearly	• listens attentively to everything that is said • offers concise and timely summaries • summarizes to revive a discussion or to end one
Label sidetracks	• lets the group members know when they're off track • lets the group decide whether to pursue current sidetracked discussion or 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?"*)
Create a safe environment	• encourages group members to share their opinions and feelings • sets the stage for non-attribution
Apply group problem solving techniques	• grasps a problem; determines cause of problem; leads group to consider all alternatives; and select other possibilities • lets group implement the solution and evaluate the results
Resolve conflict	• knows not to suppress conflict within the group • realizes conflict should be expected and dealt with constructively • prevents personal attacks

What causes the Facilitator to be unsuccessful?
What the Facilitator Should Avoid

What you should *NOT* do...	Why not?
While recording — ■ Change the wording of a participant. ■ Refuse to record an idea (looks tired, got distracted, too many ideas coming at once). ■ Lose track of key ideas.	
While discussing — ■ Judge the comments of the group. ■ Show preference to some ideas over others. ■ Become involved in the content of the group's work. ■ Monopolize conversations and become the center of attention. ■ Take sides on issues or people. ■ Attempt to have all the answers. ■ Dismiss any questions.	
Not trusting the process — ■ Flip flop the agenda and work processes. ■ Fix the group (even in the most friendly way). ■ Let a few people dominate. ■ Make decisions for the group. ■ Permit the group to get sidetracked.	

What you should *NOT* do...	Why not?
Poor group relationships — ■ Fix problems for the group. ■ Manipulate people or their behavior through their own feedback. ■ Become closed to group suggestions concerning the process. ■ Become defensive and put down people or their ideas. ■ Ignore the group's needs ■ Fail to follow up on concerns or even checking with the group for them.	
Poor communication skills — ■ Not listen to what group wants or needs. ■ Not paraphrase to ensure understanding by the group. ■ Use a negative or sarcastic tone.	

Effective Facilitators Must BE …

(adapted from *Facilitating with Ease!* By Ingrid Bens, pg. 31)

Facilitators must be…	Why is this important?
Informed ■ Listen to what the group wants or needs. ■ Gather extensive data about participants to fully understand their business and personal needs. ■ Survey and interview participants when possible. ■ Read background reports. ■ Use prepared questions to build a complete picture of the group.	■ *Permits the group to be pointed in the right direction if it is getting off track.* ■ *Permits you to offer some suggestions if group gets stuck.* ■ *Knows who knows what.*
Positive ■ Do not allow disinterest, antagonism, shyness, cynicism or other negative reactions to throw you off. ■ Focus on what can be achieved and to draw the best from each participant.	■ *A positive attitude is contagious.* ■ *Believe in everyone equally and allow equal participation by all.*
Consensual ■ Remember facilitation is fundamentally a consensus-building process. ■ Strive to create outcomes that reflect the ideas of all participants equally.	■ *It is important that everyone can live with the group's decision.* ■ *Ownership by all members of the group's decisions.*
Flexible ■ Always have a process plan for all groups. ■ Be prepared to change direction or start over if that's what is needed. ■ Bring alternative strategies and possess a good command of the process tools.	■ *Things in the group can change frequently.* ■ *Appear organized and helpful to the group and prepared to switch gears as needed.*

Facilitators must be…	Why is this important?
Understanding ■ Recognize that people are under great pressure at work. ■ Understand if members are antagonistic or cynical, it could be the result of high stress levels.	■ *Know how to manage the group.* ■ *Be sensitive to group members' feelings.*
Firm ■ Remember facilitation is not a passive activity. ■ You may need to be assertive to keep people and activities on track. ■ Be ready to step in and direct the process if the situation warrants it.	■ *Remind the group of ground rules.* ■ *Step in if there is conflict.* ■ *Help the group reach a consensus.* ■ *Help the group reach an end result.*
Alert ■ Become an expert people watcher. ■ Pay careful attention to group dynamics and notice what is going on at all times. ■ Train yourself to be watchful: both of how people interact and how well they are achieving the task.	■ *Keep track of which people are not talking and note those who do all the talking.* ■ *Give everyone a fair chance of participating.*
Unobtrusive ■ Do as little talking as possible. ■ Let the participants do all, or most of the talking. ■ Say only enough to give instructions, stop arguments, keep things on track or to sum up. ■ Do not misuse your position by being the center of attention or making yourself look important.	■ *Let group own the process.* ■ *Let group come up with THEIR OWN end result.*