

Facilitation Skills

Facilitation is most appropriate when.

1. When you want to encourage group motivation, commitment and confidence.
2. When you want to make the most of group knowledge, experience and diversity.
3. When there is more than one answer to a question, or one side to a story.
4. When a person in power wants to just be a participant.
5. When you want to learn about your group's process, or challenge an inefficient process.
6. When there are psychological blocks that need to be addressed in an issue.

Facilitation is least appropriate when.

1. When discussing issues where the only solution is administrative adjudication.
2. When the goal of a meeting is merely to inform a group.
3. When participants take turns in arriving at the meeting.
4. In crisis situations when quick decisions have to be made.

A Facilitated Approach

If your organization has decided that facilitation is appropriate, the following are some steps you should take:

- a. Orient the participants about what facilitation is, and what it can do for them.
- b. Make sure that facilitation has the administration's support.
- c. Choose the right facilitator.

Collecting Data

The following are some tips in collecting data as preparation for facilitating a meeting:

1. Communicate ahead with the person who invited you to facilitate the meeting to understand what is expected from the meeting and what is expected from you as a facilitator.
2. Interview or survey participants ahead of time
3. Request documentation about the group's previous meetings.
4. If there's a sensitive issue involved, know as much as you can about the situation.
5. Understand the subject matter of the meeting.

Facilitation Skills

Stage One: Forming

The initial stage of group development is the forming stage. During the forming stage, members tend to feel tensions and uncertainties.

Stage Two: Storming

A natural offshoot of uncertainty and ambiguity is the need to clarify expectations, establish patterns and put a structure into place. The storming stage of group development is characterized by conflict, whether overt fighting or subtle tensions.

Stage Three: Norming

The third stage of group development is the norming stage. If the conflict areas during the storming stage are addressed properly, the result should be the establishment of norms.

Stage Four: Performing

When groups are able to successfully implement a new rule or system, they can begin a period of optimum productivity.

Process elements include:

- **MEETING FLOW.** How does the meeting begin? How do they transition to another item in the agenda? Who keeps the ball rolling? Are there topic jumps? How does the meeting end?
- **PARTICIPATION.** How many people contribute to the discussion? What is the quality of their contribution? Are there highs, lows and shifts in group participation? How are silent people treated?
- **COMMUNICATION.** How do group members communicate with one another? Is the verbal communication congruent with the non-verbal communication? Who talks with whom? Who interrupts whom?
- **ROLES.** What roles do each member of the group play? Are these roles self-assigned or assigned by others? Are the roles productive? How do the members of the group respond to these roles?
- **POWER/ INFLUENCE.** Who has high influence? Who can move the group into a particular action whether positive or negative? How do they exert this power? Is the group democratic, authoritarian or permissive when it comes to discussions? Are there shifts in power/influence? Are there rivalries?
- **PROBLEM-SOLVING PROCESS.** Is the problem stated in clear workable terms? Does it seem clear to everyone what the issue is? How does the group arrive at solution? Is this method acceptable and fair to all members?
- **DECISION-MAKING PROCESS.** How are the best interests of all participants represented in the decision making process? Are there self authorized decision-makers? Does the group arrive at a consensus?
- **GROUP ATMOSPHERE.** What is the general feeling in the group? How are feelings handled? Are they encouraged and validated? Is this group capable of care? Are there significant emotional attachments between members?