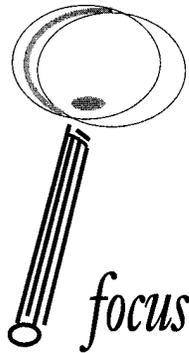


# 1

## Getting Started As a Facilitator



### Learning Objectives

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

- Define *facilitation*.
- List four uses of facilitation.
- Describe facilitator behaviors.
- Describe ways to build commitment among participants.

The term *facilitator* is drawn from Latin roots and means *one who makes things easy*. The term first came into prominence in the United States in the late 1970s when many companies introduced Quality Circles as a way to involve workers in problem solving and improvement (Robson and Beary, 1995).

### WHAT IS FACILITATION?

Facilitation is the art of helping a group or an individual determine and achieve objectives for solving a problem or completing a task. Facilitation also involves keeping the group or individual focused and on track so that the objectives are met.

Effective facilitators need strong business, interpersonal, and leadership skills to generate positive outcomes. They must be able to work in rapidly changing environments and adapt to those changes. At the same time, they have to be able to work well with diverse personalities. Although the facilitator's job is to make things easy, being a facilitator is not easy. Those who are

successful have mastered the necessary knowledge, behavior, and skills to make what they do look easy to others.

Effective facilitators are able to think on their feet because they have already learned how to facilitate and have developed their skills. However, they are also willing to admit that there is always more to learn about this complex yet rewarding role. In today's competitive marketplace, competent facilitators are being highly sought after by the most successful organizations. This program focuses on the role of the facilitator and the skills needed to be successful in this demanding, highly visible position.

## USES OF FACILITATION

Facilitation can be used in a variety of situations to help a group or an individual with a problem or task. Most often, however, facilitators are called upon to work within these four specific areas:

- Problem solving or work improvement
- Strategic planning
- Project planning
- Individual facilitating

Although the goals are different in each situation, good facilitators use essentially the same process to achieve results. This facilitation process will be examined in detail in the next chapter.

### **Problem Solving or Work Improvement**

Perhaps the most frequent use of facilitation is group problem solving or work improvement. For example, a group may be assigned a goal such as reducing assembly line errors, increasing productivity, improving quality, preventing accidents, controlling employee turnover, or maximizing profitability. The opportunities to use facilitation to solve problems or make improvements are virtually unlimited.

The focus in these situations is to get the group involved in coming up with different and, it is hoped, better ways of doing things. In some situations, the problem to be solved or the improvement to be made may be clearly defined up front; in other cases, defining the problem or the needed improvement is part of the overall facilitation process. The facilitator's role is to guide the group through an effective process to solve the problem or make the improvement.

### **Strategic Planning**

Facilitators are also frequently recruited when organizations are involved in strategic planning. Examples include such strategic tasks as developing a mission or vision statement, establishing short-term or long-term organization goals, developing strategies for market dominance, or identifying alternative products and services the organization might offer. As mentioned above,

facilitators who are effective at these tasks and who are able to establish rapport with organizational members are frequently in demand in today's competitive environment.

Strategic planning sessions can present special challenges to the facilitator depending on who in the organization is involved. If all the participants are members of senior management, the tone and depth of the discussion may be different than if the participants are middle managers. These differences result for several reasons: first, different participant groups have different perspectives on the company; second, groups have varying amounts of information about the organization and its goals; third, there are differences in authority and responsibility levels; fourth, complex internal politics may exist; fifth, senior management may or may not be willing to release confidential information. The facilitator has to determine where the group is in terms of depth and work within that framework to complete the planning process.

Strategic planning can also be difficult because it often requires dealing with numerous unknowns. Occasionally the person with the loudest voice or most persuasive argument can dominate the discussion. However, this person may not have the best or even usable input. Effective facilitators have to be able to deal with all types of participants and be sure that all sides of an issue are represented if the planning process is to be successful.

### Project Planning

A facilitator can either be helpful in developing the initial plan for a project or in getting an existing project back on track. For example, when an organization is developing a plan for introducing a new product, a facilitator can help the product team develop objectives, prepare a timeline, define areas of responsibility, set budgets, and agree on how to measure results. A facilitator may also be called in when an important project is not being completed or is missing the mark. An external facilitator, who is not a member of the project team, can often bring a fresh perspective to the project and help the group get back on track by reviewing the critical elements of the plan and working with team members to identify necessary corrective action.

Facilitation of project planning requires that the facilitator have a working knowledge of the project's scope, the capabilities of the people involved, and the commitment of the organization to the successful completion of the project. The facilitator who understands these factors is able to guide the process so that an effective and realistic plan can be developed. In some situations, an internal facilitator may be more effective when developing a project plan because of his or her knowledge of the organization and its workings. In other situations, a facilitator who has no direct ties to the organization may be able to identify and cut through any internal politics that might contribute to a problem.

### Individual Facilitating

There are four types of situations in which a facilitator can work one-on-one with individuals: coaching, training, mentoring, and improving performance.

Individualized facilitation can be used at any level in the organization. A trained facilitator can help an individual get focused and on track so that objectives are met.

*Coaching* is used to develop individuals by providing them with opportunities to practice newly learned skills and to receive frequent feedback about their success. For example, after a senior management person attends an executive training session, a facilitator could be assigned to help the person back on the job. The facilitator and the manager could identify opportunities to practice the manager's newly learned skills. The facilitator could either observe the skills being practiced or obtain feedback from others who were involved in the situation. The facilitator and manager could then meet to review what happened and determine how effective the manager was at using the skills. This process could continue until the manager and facilitator were confident of the manager's abilities.

Facilitation can be used when conducting *training* sessions. In a training environment, whether the training is one-on-one or in a group setting, the goal of facilitation is to encourage participant involvement and to use participant knowledge to enhance the learning. Some people assume that training is merely the passing of information from someone who knows to others who don't. When working with adults, this is often an erroneous assumption. Effective facilitators recognize that adults bring a wealth of knowledge and experience with them to training sessions. In many cases, adults can take an active role in their own training—all they need is someone to facilitate the training process.

*Mentoring* is used to provide guidance, answer questions, provide feedback, and generally help an individual become more effective. For example, a new senior manager might need to quickly become familiar with all sections of the organization. The mentor/facilitator could help the senior manager identify the people to meet with and help determine the objectives for such meetings. The facilitator might be involved in making introductions and then debriefing the senior manager after the discussions. In that situation, the facilitator's role is to ensure that the senior manager receives the necessary exposure to the different parts of the organization. A facilitator can make it easier for the senior manager to succeed. However, it's up to the senior manager to make the most of the opportunities.

Facilitation can be used in *improving employee performance*. A two-way discussion between facilitator and employee can help identify causes of a problem and open up numerous possible solutions. For example, if a manager is having difficulty in leading meetings, an effective facilitator can help the manager determine an appropriate course of action. The manager would try out the action in meetings as the facilitator observed. Afterwards, the facilitator would provide feedback and continue to help the manager make any adjustments and corrections needed to get performance to the desired level. Here's an example of how this might be accomplished:

- Marcia (Facilitator): Eric, I thought that meeting was the best one yet.
- Eric (Manager): You were right about using an agenda. It seemed to keep everyone focused.
- Marcia: The agenda is just the tool. You were the one who made it work.
- Eric: Next, I want to work on how to get everyone involved in the discussion.
- Marcia: Let's discuss some ways to do that and you can try them at the next meeting.

Today the use of individual facilitators in the business world is somewhat limited. However, some executives do seek out the opinions of others when they run into difficulties. The executive who wants to improve his or her organization must be willing to make personal improvements as well. Normally these improvements don't happen automatically. A willingness to ask for help and to work one-on-one with a facilitator is a good first step toward making personal-and organizational-improvements.



### Think About It . . .

What types of situations exist in your organization that could benefit from the use of facilitation?

## FACILITATOR BEHAVIORS

The facilitator's role is to help individuals or groups get things done. Effective facilitators use certain behaviors that enable them to work well with others. These behaviors fall into two categories: *what* facilitators do and *how* they do it. Effective facilitators use these behaviors to maintain control while ensuring goals are achieved. These facilitation behaviors are the foundation for the interpersonal facilitation skills described in Chapter 4.

### What Facilitators Do

The best facilitators practice several maintenance behaviors that keep the process moving forward and going in the right direction. Facilitators must:

- Provide structure
- Focus on results
- Manage time and the agenda

#### *Facilitators Provide Structure*

An effective facilitator allows the individual or group a great deal of latitude and encourages open discussion while working on a problem or project. This

does not mean that the process is helter-skelter. The facilitator allows the creative process to occur within a defined structure that keeps the group working on the issues at hand. The facilitation model in Chapter 2 provides a framework for the effective discussion of any problem or task.

### *Facilitators Focus on Results*

Effective facilitators keep the group focused on their objectives. Sometimes discussion will cover a broad area and issues that are unrelated to the topic at hand will be brought up. The facilitator has to continually push, pull, and nudge the group back in the right direction, always walking a fine line between encouraging participation and cutting off irrelevant discussion.

For example, a work improvement group might have the objective of increasing productivity on the assembly line. In the course of the discussion, the group begins to focus on the negative impact of government regulations on productivity. Although this may be true, the facilitator has to recognize that changing government regulations is beyond the scope of the group's objective. The facilitator must keep the group focused on addressing issues within their control so that valuable time is not spent on things unrelated to the group's purpose.

One way to handle these situations is to use the "parking lot" technique. A piece of flip-chart paper is labeled with the words *Parking Lot*. If important topics come up that are not related to the discussion at hand, they are written on the parking lot sheet. The discussion may follow along these lines:

Carl (Facilitator): What other issues do we need to consider?  
Linda (Participant): I heard that our competitor down the street is adding a new computer system.  
Carl: How do you think that knowledge affects our current discussion?  
Linda: It may not directly affect us right now. But, we may need to consider changes to our computer system.  
Carl: Does anyone else have a thought on that?  
Mike: That's good to know. It may affect other decisions we make, but I don't think it's related to the topic at hand.  
Carl: What if we "park" that thought and come back to it later?  
Linda: I'll agree to that.  
Carl: Okay. At the end of the day we'll come back to all the items in our "parking lot" and decide what to do with them.

### *Manage Time and the Agenda*

Time is always a precious commodity in today's environment. Effective facilitators are aware of the need to keep things moving and make the best use of this valuable and limited resource. One of the ways the facilitator can accomplish this is to provide a written agenda so that the group knows what needs to be accomplished during their meeting. When possible and practical, some facilitators choose to allocate a set amount of time to each agenda item.

Even with a set agenda, there is still a need to be flexible so that additional time can be spent on certain topics if necessary. A written agenda allows the group to be involved in controlling the use of time. If the group members

know how many things need to be discussed and the amount of time available, they will help keep the group on track. Or, if they decide to spend more time on one issue, they will know that adjustments must be made elsewhere.

## How Facilitators Do What They Do

The *how* of what facilitators do includes behaviors that ensure that participants will work in a constructive manner. Facilitators need to be sure that all participants will have an opportunity to contribute to the process. Specifically, facilitators must:

- Encourage participation
- Show empathy
- Remain objective
- Avoid manipulating or embarrassing anyone
- Stay committed to the process

### *Facilitators Encourage Participation*

The more participation, the more likely facilitators will be able to obtain good results. Effective facilitators take advantage of the synergy of the group. They aim for quantity of ideas first because they know they can find quality within those ideas. Generating numerous ideas is a lot easier when everyone is actively involved in the process.

Participation is also critical if the group is to buy-in to the final decision once the facilitation process is over. When everyone participates, there is a sense of ownership in what is being discussed and the resulting decisions that are made. This ownership is critical when it comes time to take action because participants will be more likely to take responsibility for implementing the plan.

### *Facilitators Show Empathy*

The facilitator must continually put himself or herself in the place of each participant. Effective facilitators are aware of the group's leanings and can relate to their point of view. This does not mean giving in to what the group wants, but it does mean being aware of what they want.

Seeing things from the group's point of view allows the facilitator to better judge when to cut off discussion and when to allow it to continue. Internal facilitators will usually have more empathy for the group; but it's important that they don't let their empathy turn into advocacy for special causes. An external facilitator can develop empathy by becoming acquainted with the organization and the situation at hand before working with the organization.

### *Facilitators Remain Objective*

Enthusiasm for the facilitation process is a necessary requirement for success. On the other hand, becoming emotionally involved in the discussion can lead to a biased perspective. It is difficult to remain neutral if the facilitator

becomes caught up in the feelings and passions of the group. Effective facilitators remain objective and help the group or individual achieve the defined goal.

For example, someone in a problem-solving group may come up with what the facilitator considers to be an ideal solution to the problem being discussed. However, other group members may believe the proposed solution is inappropriate or not likely to succeed. If the facilitator allows his or her beliefs to be known to the group, the effectiveness of the process will be diminished because the facilitator will be perceived as taking sides rather than remaining neutral.

Effective facilitators are able to admit when they don't know or are unsure of something. They are also willing to share their own experiences when it will be of benefit to the group. That doesn't mean just sharing successes; they also have to be willing to discuss their own mistakes. The more open the facilitator is, the more open participants will be. Facilitators who remain closed and aloof from the group are unlikely to have much involvement. Here's an example of how a facilitator might share his experiences.

Bill (Facilitator): I remember one of the first times I led a session like this. Someone asked a question and I didn't know the answer. Rather than admitting it, I tried to bluff my way through.

Frank (Participant): Did you fool them?

Bill: No, I only fooled myself. Another member of the group knew the right answer and corrected me immediately.

Frank: What happened?

Bill: I had to admit I really didn't know. I learned something that day. If you don't know something, say so up front. So in the course of our discussion today, you can be sure that if I say "I don't know"-I don't know.

### *Facilitators Avoid Manipulating or Embarrassing Anyone*

Effective facilitators avoid hidden agendas. They understand that participants want and need to know that the facilitator is being honest with them. Everything must be above board, with all cards on the table. If participants suspect that the facilitator is trying to lead them to reach a predetermined solution, they will not be open in sharing their ideas. Participants also need to have complete trust that the facilitator will maintain confidentiality when requested to do so. Facilitators that do not "shoot straight" will likely lose their group's respect and commitment.

Effective facilitators always keep in mind that their objective is to help the individual or group reach agreement as to what will work best for them. Facilitators who try to push their ideas on the group may lead participants to feel that their time is being wasted. Participants who feel that they are being manipulated will commonly make comments like "If that's what you wanted, why didn't you just say so and save us all a lot of time."

Participants in a facilitated discussion must be treated with respect and dignity. They have been selected for their knowledge or expertise as it applies to the situation being discussed. Comments or suggestions that may seem off

the wall to the facilitator may be sincerely offered. Taking participant suggestions lightly or embarrassing them is likely to cause them to retreat and limit their participation in the future.

Doing anything to embarrass participants can also lead to resentment. The facilitator who embarrasses one person in a group may find the rest of the group siding with that person. A competitive, rather than supportive, environment is likely to be created, with participants choosing sides. Instead of working together, people will be at odds with each other and the time spent will become counter-productive.

### *Facilitators Stay Committed to the Process*

Facilitation is hard work. Everything does not always go as smoothly as expected or as planned. The dynamics of a group can create frustration on the part of participants or the facilitator-or both at the same time. There may be times when it seems like the best course of action would be to terminate the process and do something different.

Effective facilitators remember that one of the reasons they are there is to help the group work through the situation. If it were easy, a facilitator would not have been needed in the first place. The facilitator's commitment and dedication to the process can serve as a role model for the group. When the group understands that the facilitator is committed to their success, they are more likely to maintain or renew their commitment.

All these *what* and *how* behaviors provide a foundation on which to build the effective facilitation skills described in Chapter 4. The combination of the behaviors discussed in this chapter and well-developed skills can help ensure a facilitator's success.



### **Think About It . . .**

Use Exhibit 1–1 to evaluate your use of these behaviors. Based on your evaluation, develop a list of things you can do to make improvements.

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## **BUILDING COMMITMENT**

Being involved in the facilitation process can be an exhilarating experience for some participants. They like the idea of exploring new ideas and discussing different ways of doing things. Unfortunately, however, some people who like to think of themselves as "idea" people aren't as enthusiastic about executing the ideas. Effective facilitators know it is important for participants to be committed to the entire facilitation process (see the six step model in Chapter 2) and not just to part of the process. The best way to obtain commitment to the entire process is to get commitment *before* the

**xhibit 1-1****Ranking My Facilitator Behavior**

Effective facilitators use certain behaviors that enable them to work well with others. These behaviors fall into two categories: *what* facilitators do and *how* they do it. Effective facilitators use these behaviors to maintain control while at the same time ensuring goals are achieved. Rate your use of each behavior using the following scale:

- 5—Always
- 4—Frequently
- 3—Occasionally
- 2—Rarely
- 1—Never

**WHAT I DO**

- Provide structure
- Focus on results
- Manage time and the agenda

**HOW I DO IT**

- Encourage participation
  - Show empathy
  - Remain objective
  - Avoid manipulating or embarrassing anyone
  - Stay committed to the process
- 
- 

facilitation session begins. To build commitment before and during the process facilitators must:

- Establish expectations
- Use the "we" approach
- Provide support and resources
- Encourage the acceptance of responsibility and authority
- Take a personal interest

**Establishing Expectations**

Effective facilitators let potential participants know up front what will be expected of them so they can decide if they are willing to make the necessary commitment. The best facilitators explain the process that will be followed and the amount of time that will be required for meetings and follow up activities. They also explain the skills and abilities required for contributing to the team process. Establishing expectations in the beginning allows people to remove themselves if they are unable or unwilling to make the required commitment to the process.

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## Using the "We" Approach

Once the facilitation process begins, effective facilitators build commitment by including themselves as a member of the team. They indicate to the group that the problems and situations that are being addressed are "our" problems, not "your" problems. Throughout the facilitation process they use the pronoun we instead of the pronouns I and you. They do not set themselves apart from the participants, but rather they go out of their way to establish empathy with the team members. The facilitators who do this well know that it is important not to show favoritism. They do everything in their power to treat all members of the team equally and with respect.

Using the "we" approach is a balancing act because effective facilitators know they must stop short of full involvement when it is time for the team to make decisions and take action. The "we" approach is used to convey empathy for participants and to demonstrate a desire to be involved with the team. Top facilitators also make it clear that when it is time to make specific decisions that will impact the participants and their organization, the participants must take full ownership. Successful facilitators do not walk away at this point, but continue to help the team make the best decisions. They also provide support and resources to keep the process moving forward.

## Providing Support and Resources

Effective facilitators do not get involved in taking action—they know that is the team's responsibility. However, they do take an active interest in helping the team achieve its objectives. The best facilitators are willing to provide support and resources to team members. Support may come in the form of being available to listen, to make suggestions, or to provide recommendations on individual assignments. Resources may come in the form of books, articles, or names of other people who have expertise that could benefit the team. The best facilitators do not do the work for the participants, but provide support and resources as needed so participants can get their work done.

## Encouraging Acceptance of Responsibility and Authority

When it comes time to prepare an action plan, effective facilitators encourage team members to accept both responsibility and authority for their tasks. They know that building commitment means giving a person the authority to carry out the task they agreed to do. Although they have no direct line responsibility, these facilitators encourage the decision makers to give all participants an active role in carrying out their tasks. The facilitators know that this process not only builds commitment, but it also provides the participants with the opportunity to develop new skills.

## Taking a Personal Interest

Effective facilitators take a personal interest in the people they assist. They are not just concerned with the end results, but they also want to make sure the experience is a good one for the participants. Depending on the situation,

top facilitators act as counselors, coaches, or partners. They put the needs and success of the team above their own feelings. They do their best to balance the objectives of the facilitation process with the needs of the people on the team. Effectively striking this balance creates a facilitation process in which both the facilitator and the participants come away confident of their accomplishments.



### Think About It . . .

You are facilitating a strategy session with seven people, two of whom seem less than committed. What specific actions can you take to encourage their commitment to the facilitation process?

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Facilitation is the art of helping a group or an individual determine and achieve objectives for solving a problem or completing a task. Facilitators are called upon to help make the process easier for the group or individual.

Facilitation can be used in a variety of situations, however, most facilitation involves: (1) problem solving or work improvement; (2) strategic planning; (3) project planning; and (4) working with individuals. Although the goals are different in each situation, the process used by the facilitator is essentially the same.

The facilitator's role is to help individuals or groups get things done. Effective facilitators know *what* to do and *how* to do it. The *what* behaviors involve providing structure, focusing on results, and managing time and the agenda. The *how* behaviors involve encouraging participation, showing empathy, remaining objective, avoiding manipulating or embarrassing participants, and staying committed to the process. The most effective facilitators are able to focus simultaneously on what to do and how to do it to achieve optimal results.

The success of any facilitation effort depends on the commitment of the participants to the entire process. Successful facilitators work to obtain this commitment by establishing expectations before they begin working with a team. This allows potential participants to remove themselves if they are unable or unwilling to make the necessary commitment. Once the facilitation process begins, facilitators build commitment by using a "we" approach, providing support and resources to participants, encouraging participants to accept both responsibility and authority, and taking a personal interest in the participants.



## Review Questions

1. A facilitator is one who: 1. (b)
  - (a) solves problems for people.
  - (b) makes things easy.
  - (c) implements decisions.
  - (d) ensures quality work.
  
2. When facilitating for an organization, the facilitator should: 2. (d)
  - (a) work to achieve the CEO's objectives.
  - (b) ensure that his or her own experience is seen as valuable.
  - (c) do whatever it takes to become accepted by the group.
  - (d) remain neutral and maximize group involvement.
  
3. Facilitation has many uses. Which of the following situations most readily lends itself to the use of facilitation? 3. (b)
  - (a) Describing, in detail, company policies and procedures at an employee meeting
  - (b) Leading a discussion on ways to reduce employee absenteeism
  - (c) Preparing a written report of last year's financial results
  - (d) Presenting the company's annual budget to shareholders
  
4. Which of the following behaviors would best convey that the facilitator is taking a neutral position? 4. (a)
  - (a) Avoiding emotional involvement in a discussion
  - (b) Ensuring results orientation throughout the process
  - (c) Avoiding comments that might embarrass a participant
  - (d) Encouraging participants to share their ideas

5. One of the ways effective facilitators build commitment to the facilitation process is to: 5. (c)
- (a) ignore conflict unless it becomes personal.
  - (b) require long hours whenever necessary.
  - (c) establish expectations in the beginning.
  - (d) have participants take lots of notes during the session.