Facilitation Core Practices Overview

✓ **Stay neutral on content** – your job is to focus on the *process* role and avoid the temptation of offering opinions about the topic under discussion. You should use questions and suggestions to offer ideas that spring to mind, but never impose opinions on the group.

✓ **Listen actively** – look people in the eye, use attentive body language and paraphrase what they are saying. Always make eye contact with people while they speak, when paraphrasing what they have just said, and when summarizing their key ideas. Also use eye contact to let people know they can speak next, and to prompt the quiet ones in the crowd to participate.

✓ **Ask questions** – this is the most important tool you possess. Questions test assumptions, invite participation, gather information, and probe for hidden points. Effective questioning allows you to delve past the symptoms to get at root causes.

✓ **Paraphrase to clarify** – this involves repeating what people say to make sure they know they are being heard, to let others hear their points a second time, and to clarify key ideas. (i.e. *"Are you saying . . .? Am I understanding you to mean . . . ?"*)

✓ **Synthesize ideas** – don't just record individual ideas of participants. Instead, get people to comment and build on each other's thoughts to ensure that the ideas recorded on the flip chart represent collective thinking. This builds consensus and commitment. (i.e. *"Alice, what would you add to Jeff's comments?"*)

✓ **Stay on track** – set time guidelines for each discussion. Appoint a time keeper inside the group to use a timer and call out milestones. Point out the digression if discussion has veered off topic. *"Park"* all off-topic comments and suggestions on a separate "Parking Lot" sheet posted on a nearby wall, to be dealt with later.

✓ **Give and receive feedback** – periodically *"hold up a mirror"* to help the group *"see"* itself so it can make corrections. (i.e. *"Only two people are engaged in this discussion, while three others are reading. What's this telling us we need to do?"*) Also ask for and accept feedback about the facilitation. (i.e. *"Are we making progress? How's the pace? What can I do to be more effective?"*)

✓ **Test assumptions** – you need to bring the assumptions people are operating under out into the open and clarify them, so that they are clearly understood by everyone. These assumptions may even need to be challenged before a group 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** – keep track of both emerging ideas and final decisions. Make clear and accurate summaries on a flipchart or electronic board so everyone can see the notes. Notes should be brief and concise. They must always reflect what the participants actually said, rather than your interpretation of what they said.

✓ **Summarize clearly** – a great facilitator listens attentively to everything that is said, and then offers concise and timely summaries. Summarize when you want to revive a discussion that has ground to a halt, or to end a discussion when things seem to be wrapping up.

✓ **Label sidetracks** – it's your responsibility to let the group members know when they're off track. They can then decide to pursue the sidetrack, or stop their current discussion and 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?"*)

✓ **Park it** – at every meeting, tape a flip chart sheet to a wall to record all sidetrack items. Later, these items can be reviewed for inclusion in a future agenda. "Parking lot" sheets let you capture ideas that may be important later, while staying on track.

✓ **Use the spell-check button** – most people are nervous enough about writing on flip charts without having to worry that they're spelling every word right. You'll relax everyone by drawing a *spell-check button* at the top right corner of every flip sheet. Tell participants they *"can spell creatively, since pressing the spell-check button automatically eliminates all errors."*

Facilitation Core Practices Observation Sheet

Facilitator:	Observer's:

Behaviors that Help	Behaviors that Hinder

Behaviors that Help

__ listens actively

__ maintains eye contact

__ helps identify needs

__ gets buy-in

__ surfaces concerns

__ defines problems

__ brings everyone into the discussion

__ uses good body language and intonation

__ paraphrases continuously

__ provides feedback

__ accepts and uses feedback

__ checks time and pace

__ provides useful feedback

__ monitors and adjusts the process

__ asks relevant, probing questions

__ keeps an open attitude

__ stays neutral

__ offers suggestions

__ is optimistic and positive

__ manages conflict well

__ takes a problem-solving approach

__ stays focused on process

__ ping-pongs ideas around

__ makes accurate notes that reflect the discussion

__ looks calm and pleasant

__ is flexible about changing the approach used

__ skillfully summarizes what is said

__ knows when to stop

Behaviors that Hinder

__ oblivious to group needs

__ no follow-up on concerns

__ poor listening

__ strays into content

__ loses track of key ideas

__ makes poor notes

__ ignores conflicts

__ gets defensive

__ puts down people

__ no paraphrasing

__ lets a few people dominate

__ never asks "How are we doing?"

__ tries to be the center of attention

__ lets the group get sidetracked

__ projects a poor image

__ uses negative or sarcastic tone

__ talks too much

__ doesn't know when to stop

__ provides no alternatives for structuring the discussion

Additional Observations:

Facilitation Process Flow Observation Sheet

Facilitator	Observer's Comments
Clarifies the purpose	
Creates buy-in for the proposed challenge	
Checks assumptions	
Makes sure there are norms	
Establishes the process	
Sets time frames	
Stays neutral and objective	
Paraphrases continuously	
Acts lively and positively	
Makes clear notes	
Asks good probing questions	
Makes helpful suggestions	
Encourages participation	
Addresses conflict	
Sets a good pace	
Checks the process	
Moves smoothly to new topics	
Makes clear and timely summaries	
Knows when to stop	

Fundamentals of Meeting Management: Developing a Meeting Agenda

1. Create and use a detailed agenda that includes the following:
    * the goals or outcomes for the meeting
    * the topics for discussion, plus a brief description of what is involved and what needs to be accomplished
    * a time guideline for each item
    * the name of the person bringing forward the item
    * the details of the process to be used for each discussion

2. Develop clear, step-by-step process notes that describe the tools and techniques that will be used. (See the two sample designs on the next pages.)

3. Clarify roles and responsibilities for the meeting such as facilitator, chairperson, minute take, timekeeper, and scribe.

4. Set clear meeting norms. Make sure that the group has clear norms for behavior and that those norms are created by the members and posted at the meeting.

5. Manage participation. Make sure that everyone is part of the discussion, that structure exists for each item, and that there is effective use of decision-making tools to bring closure to items.

6. Make periodic process checks to make sure progress is being made. Check for progress, check the pace, check the process, and take the pulse of the group. (See "Sample Process Check Survey" sheet.)

7. Take minutes.

8. Determine next steps and make specific follow-up plans.

9. Design and conduct a post meeting evaluation. (See the "Sample Meeting Exit Survey" and "Meeting Effectiveness Survey" sheets.)

Meeting Planning Checklist

❒ What is the overall goal of the facilitation activity?

❒ What are the objectives and expected outcomes of the session?

❒ Who should ideally attend?

❒ What homework do participants need to do?

❒ Number of participants:_____ Do they need to be introduced? Does the group need a warm-up exercise to build familiarity or break the ice? If so, what should be its purpose and length?

❒ What's the nature of the conversations that need to be part of this meeting? What activities/process tools do you expect to be using at the session? Assign a percentage to each of the following:
  _____ % of the meeting that will be information sharing
  _____ % of the meeting that will be planning discussions
  _____ % of the meeting that will be problem solving activities
  _____ % of the meeting that will be relationship building conversations

❒ Describe the decisions that need to be made. How difficult is each decision?

❒ Is there likely to be resistance? If so, what buy-in question(s) or targeted norming question(s) should be asked to overcome that resistance?

❒ What else might go wrong during the facilitation? What challenges should you anticipate? (Possible Considerations: interpersonal conflicts, cynicism, lack of energy, overwhelming task, unable to achieve closure, lack of skills, etc.) For each possible problem, also identify strategies to overcome it.

❒ What will you say to clarify your role? Who else needs to have their role clarified?

❒ What specific norming questions need to be asked in order to create the most effective climate for the session? [Make sure that the group has clear norms for behavior and that those norms are created by the members and posted at the meeting.]

❒ What questions will you ask during a mid-point check? (See "Sample Process Check Survey" sheet.)

❒ What questions will you post on the exit survey at the end of the meeting? (See the "Sample Meeting Exit Survey" and "Meeting Effectiveness Survey" sheets.)

❒ What audiovisual aids, videos, and other props will you need?

Meeting Effectiveness Survey

Instructions: Please give your candid opinions of the meetings you attended as part of this group. Rate the characteristics of the meetings by circling the appropriate number on each scale to represent your evaluation. Remain anonymous. Return the survey to your group facilitator. *Remember, you are rating the meetings of this group.*

1. MEETING OBJECTIVES
Are objectives clearly set out in advance of the meeting?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Objectives are seldom set out in advance

Objectives are always set out in advance

2. COMMUNICATION
Are agendas circulated to all members in advance of the meeting?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Agendas are rarely circulated in advance

Agendas are always circulated in advance

3. START TIMES
Do meetings start on time?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Meetings hardly ever start on time

Meetings always start on time

4. TIME LIMITS
Are time limits set for each agenda item?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

We do not set time limits

Time limits are always set for each item

5. MEETING REVIEW
Are action items from the previous meeting(s) brought forward?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Items are seldom brought forward

Items are always brought forward from previous meetings

6. WARM-UP
Is there a meeting warm-up to hear from all members?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

We seldom use a meeting warm-up

We often use a meeting warm-up

7. ROLE CLARITY

Are roles (i.e. timekeeper, scribe, facilitator) made clear?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Roles are not
identified

Roles are always
clearly defined

8. SETTING

Is there quiet place for the meeting, with ample work space, flip charts and AV support?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

The meeting place is
not well suited

The meeting place
is very good

9. PROCESS

Is there clarity before each topic as to how that item will be managed?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

There is rarely any
planning on process

There is always clarity
on process

10. PREPARATION

Does everyone come prepared and ready to make decisions?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

We are often unprepared

We are generally prepared

11. INTERRUPTIONS

Are meetings being disrupted due to people leaving, phones ringing, pagers beeping, etc.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

There are constant interruptions

We control interruptions

12. PARTICIPATION

Are all members fully exchanging views, taking responsibility for action items and follow-up?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

People hold back and
don't take ownership

Everyone offers ideas
and takes action

13. LEADERSHIP

Does one person make all the decisions, or is there a sharing of authority?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

The manager holds the chair
and makes most decisions

Authority is shared

14. PACE

How would you rate the pace of the meetings?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Poor

Just right

15. TRACKING
Do meetings stay on track and follow the agenda?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Meetings usually stray off track　　　　　　　　　　　　　Meetings usually stay on track

16. RECORD KEEPING
Are quality minutes kept and circulated?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Yes, they are　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　No, they are not

17. LISTENING
Do members practice active listening?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

We don't listen closely　　　　　　　　　　　　Members listen actively
to each other

18. CONFLICT MANAGEMENT
Are differences of opinion suppressed, or is conflict effectively used?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Conflict isn't very　　　　　　　　　　　　Conflict is effectively
effectively used　　　　　　　　　　　　exploited for new ideas

19. DECISION MAKING
Does the group generally make good decisions at our meetings?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

We tend to make　　　　　　　　　　　　We tend to make
poor decisions　　　　　　　　　　　　good decisions

20. CLOSURE
Do we tend to end topics before getting into new ones?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

We constantly start　　　　　　　　　　　　We close each topic
new topics　　　　　　　　　　　　before moving on

21. CONSENSUS
Do we work hard to make collaborative decisions that we can all live with?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

We abandon consensus　　　　　　　　　　　　We work hard
too easily　　　　　　　　　　　　to reach consensus

22. FOLLOW-UP
Is there good coherent follow-up to commitments made at meetings?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

We tend not to　　　　　　　　　　　　There is consistent
follow up well　　　　　　　　　　　　follow-up

Starting a Facilitation Checklist

- ✓ Introduce yourself and give a brief personal background.

- ✓ Clarify the role you'll be playing as the facilitator.

- ✓ Clarify the roles to be played by any other members.

- ✓ Go around the room and have members introduce themselves by name and perhaps position, especially if there are people present who don't know each other.

- ✓ Conduct a warm-up activity to relax the group. Make sure this fits with the time available and activity focus.

- ✓ Review any data collected from members. Have key points written on flip chart paper or as a handout or on a PowerPoint presentation. Answer any questions.

- ✓ Clarify the goal and the specific objectives for the session.

- ✓ Review the agenda and invite comments. Test for acceptance of the agenda.

- ✓ Specify time frames. Appoint a timekeeper. Bring in a large clock or other timing device.

- ✓ Take care of all housekeeping items.

- ✓ Get the group to set norms for the session by asking *"What rules should we abide by during this meeting?"* Post these norms on a wall within clear view of all members.

- ✓ Set up a parking sheet to keep track of digressions for later review.

- ✓ Proceed to the first item on the agenda. Make sure everyone is clear about what's about to be discussed.

- ✓ Explain the *process*, or how you'll be handling this agenda item.

- ✓ Be sure that the time frame for the first item is set. Have a timekeeper and a minute taker on hand.

- ✓ Begin with the discussion.

During a Facilitation Checklist

Your key contribution during any meeting is to provide the structure and process focus that will keep the discussion moving efficiently and effectively. You'll need to:
- ✓ ensure that all members participate
- ✓ manage conflicts
- ✓ keep the group on topic
- ✓ "park" off-topic items
- ✓ help members adhere to their ground rules
- ✓ make interventions if there are problems
- ✓ maintain a high energy level
- ✓ set a positive tone
- ✓ keep track of the discussion by making concise notes

As a meeting proceeds, periodically employ the following process checks:

✓ **Check the pace**: Ask members how the pace feels to them.

   "Are we moving too slow? …too fast? What can we do to improve the pace?"

   Respond to their assessments by implementing needed adjustments.

✓ **Check the process**: Periodically ask members if the approach being taken is working.

   "Is the tool we're using helping us with our discussion?"

   Adjust the process throughout the session to ensure that things keep working.

✓ **Take the pulse of members**: Continuously read faces and body language to determine how people are feeling. Don't hesitate to ask:

   "How is everyone feeling?
   Is everyone still feeling connected?
   Do we need to take a break or pick up the pace?

   "Reading" people lets you know when to stop for a break or bring lost members back into the fold.

✓ **Summarize**: When there are lots of the ideas floating, summarize what's being said. Summarizing helps people who might have lost track of the conversation get back in. It can revive a group in a slump or help move the group towards closure.

   Stop and review: *"Let's see what we've got so far."*

   If the discussion seems to be winding up: *"Let me read what we've said to see if we've reached a conclusion."*

Ending a Facilitation Checklist

One of the most common problems in any meeting is lack of closure. Lots of things get discussed, but there is no clear path forward. One of your key contributions is to ensure that decisions are arrived at and detailed action steps are in place before the group adjourns.

Here are some ways you can help a group bring effective closure to a meeting:

- ✓ Make clear statements about what has been decided and write these decisions on a flip chart.

- ✓ Ensure that they've created detailed action plans with names, accountabilities and dates beside each step.

- ✓ Round up items not discussed at the meeting, including those on the "parking lot" list, prioritize them, and create plans to deal with them in future.

- ✓ Create an agenda for the next meeting.

- ✓ Decide on a means for follow-up, either written reports or a group session.

- ✓ Help members decide who will take all the flip chart sheets for transcribing.

- ✓ Conduct a written evaluation of the session.

- ✓ Solicit personal feedback from participants.

- ✓ Allow members to express how they felt about the session.

- ✓ Clarify your role in the follow-up process.

Once the session is over, thank the participants for having you facilitate and help clean up.

Sample Follow-Up Report Format

Please provide your feedback and update information about our session.

Date: _____

Objective: _____

Results achieved: What do you regard as the major outcomes for that meeting?

Work completed: Which of the action plans created at that session has been completed by you since then? What was achieved?

Work outstanding: Which action items are you still working on or planning to work on? What's the time frame for these activities?

Next steps: Are there any steps that the whole group needs to take in order to help you complete your action plans? Are there any further discussions that need to take place?