Facilitation Toolkit

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.

Facilitation Process Flow Observation Sheet

Facilitator	Reflections
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	

Guiding the Group through the Stages of Development

There are many factors which contribute to the experience and effectiveness of groups. However the effectiveness of a group does not need to be left up to chance. All groups develop and interact in a similar manner, regardless of their purpose or membership. Each stage in the process has associated feelings and characteristic interactions among the members. When the group leader understands the process of group development and the dynamics of group interaction, her or she enables the group to function at its best. The role of a leader is to tend to the needs at each stage and encourage the group to grow together toward the next stage. Below is an overview of the typical stages in group development and the role of the leader at each stage.

Forming: Gathering and Orientation
The move from being an individual to being a member of a team can be stressful. It is normal to have conflicting feelings as we take on new roles - fear and anxiety, excitement and anticipation, pride at being chosen for the team. The team's first order of business includes attempts to define tasks and work through group dynamics. Experts note that at this stage many abstract discussions about concepts and issues are likely to occur. Discussions irrelevant to the team and complaints about the organization are common. Because of the many distractions, it is normal for the team to accomplish little regarding its goals.

Common characteristics
- The initial stage – members don't know one another
- General sense of politeness and curiosity
- People check each other out
- Feelings of anxiety about the unknown, insecurity about being accepted or rejected

The leader's role: Lessen anxieties by clarifying the expectations and purpose of the team. Identify guidelines for participation. Encourage questions and include everyone.

Storming: Making Connections
Once team members move into the project, they may realize it is different from what they expected and more difficult than they thought. They are likely to become impatient with the lack of progress, yet too new to the task to be able to make decisions. Team members may want to draw on their own experiences rather than collaborate with the other members.

Common characteristics
- arguing among members, even when they agree on real issues
- defensiveness and competition
- establishing unrealistic goals
- tension and jealousy
- questioning of leader
- questions about how we work together, what we are doing, who do I have to influence

At this point the situation seems hopeless and team members wonder if the team can succeed. This is normal. In fact, it is how the members are getting to know and understand each other.

The leader's role: Affirm the value of each person and focus on what team members have in common rather than on how they differ. Emphasize shared responsibility and cooperation toward a common goal,

and commitment to work through any conflicts that arise. Do not deny or avoid tension when it surfaces, but help the team to move through it and then on to the next stage.

Norming: Establishing an Identity
More time and energy are spent on goals during this stage since this is when members come to accept the team, the team ground rules, their roles on the team, and each other as individuals.

Common characteristics
- competitive relationships becoming more cooperative
- members being able to express criticism constructively
- more friendliness and personal sharing
- a sense of cohesion, common spirit and goals
- a sense of relief that everything is going to work out
- begin to work together as a group
- roles and responsibilities defined and delegated

The leader's role: Over-reliance on the team leader is possible at this point, so encourage the members to take responsibility for the work. This fosters confidence and a sense of accomplishment. Be sure to provide appropriate praise and encouragement for individuals and the team as a whole.

Performing: Getting the Job Done
At this stage, the team begins to function as a team. With relationships and expectations established, team members work at constructive self-change and prevent or work through group problems. Members feel a close attachment to the team, which has become an effective, cohesive unit. Experts say that your team has reached this stage when you start to get a lot of work done.

Common characteristics
- Group is cohesive and confident, working toward goal
- Shared pride and mutual respect
- Feelings include relaxed sharing, trust, and acceptance

The leader's role: Maintain the comfort level and keep the team moving toward its objective. Focus on acknowledging, supporting, and encouraging collaborative efforts. Remember that when new members come into the team or if the leadership changes, your team may revert to an earlier stage. This should be temporary. Relax and remember that team building takes time before it takes hold.

When the team finishes its work, people may feel the anxiety and grief associated with transition and saying good-bye. It is important to discuss transition issues and needs. Provide a way for people to celebrate what they have accomplished, to be thanked for their work, and to put closure on the experience through an appropriate ritual.

Common characteristics
- Transition and disbursement; key is bringing closure to the experience together
- Feelings include anxiety and grieving associated with saying good-bye; level of relationships will determine intensity of departing

The leader's role: The role of the leader is to provide ways to celebrate efforts and acknowledge accomplishments and losses; provide a way to say good-bye and appreciate contributions.

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.

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.

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?

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."*

Balancing Task and Relationship Functions in Groups

Group dynamics are the interactions among group members while the group is working. One function of group leadership is maintaining relationships within the group; the other role is helping members accomplish the group's goals and tasks. The balance between how the group works together (relationship) and what members accomplish as a result of the work (task) is crucial. If members focus too much on their relationship they will grow close but get little done. If they spend all their time on task they will get the job done, but they probably will not feel connected to each other. We must strike a balance.

Relationship Functions

There are several ways to maintain good relationships among the members of a group. These maintenance functions are important to morale and create the kind of atmosphere that allows each person to contribute out of his or her full potential. Here are six essential relationship behaviors of group leaders *and*, eventually, of group members themselves:

- **Encouraging**: Be friendly, warm and respectful to others: *"I am glad to see everyone here today."*
- **Expressing Group Feelings:** Try to sense feelings within the group and share them with the other members: *"I'm sensing some reluctance on this issue. Is there a problem?"* or *"I think we all need a break."*
- **Harmonizing:** Reduce tension and try to get people to explore their differences: *"There's no need to be defensive. These are all good ideas."*
- **Compromising**: When your opinion is involved in a conflict, offer a compromise that will bring resolution: *"I would prefer that we support the city council plan to provide summer programs for inner-city kids, but Charlie makes a strong case for standing against it because of where the money will be taken from. Unless someone has a third option, let's take another look at Charlie's idea."*
- **Gate Keeping:** Keep the lines of communication open and invite everyone to participate in the conversation: *"I think Maria is trying to say something. Let's hear her out."*
- **Process Observing:** Watch how the group is operating and share what you see with the group: *"These are interesting observations, but we've drifted off course. Let's get back to our agenda."*

Task Functions

Group members also have a job to do—there are goals that direct the group and work that must be completed. Here are six essential task behaviors of group leaders and, eventually, of group members themselves:

- **Initiating**: Start the discussion. Propose tasks, goals and actions. Suggest a procedure: *"Let's write the ideas on the flip chart and analyze them. Who will be our recorder?"*
- **Information or Opinion-Seeking:** Request facts or information about group concerns or opinions: *"Whom should we invite to the workshop?"* or *"What do you think about . . .?"*
- **Information-Giving:** Provide facts or information about group topics or concerns. People can concentrate on what they are doing if they know what is going on: *"We had to cut the budget by ten percent in that area. If we want to keep the program at this level we will have to do some fund-raising or find a grant."*
- **Consensus-Testing**: Check with the group to see how much agreement has been reached: *"Could we go around the table quickly and let all members share one sentence about where they stand on this question?"*
- **Summarizing:** Pull together related ideas. Offer a decision or conclusion for group members to consider: *"What I hear the group saying is this . . . ."*
- **Clarifying:** Interpret ideas or suggestions. Clarify issues before the group: *"I think what she means is that we do not know if we can afford that program."*

Decision-Making with Groups

Voting: This method works in very large groups. For a "simple majority" the choice with the most votes wins. A "true majority" requires the support of fifty percent plus one. Arriving at a decision with a true majority will probably take more than one vote as the group eliminates low-scoring choices.
- Benefits: This is seen as a "fair" way of making decisions.
- Drawbacks: Group members may feel like winners or losers. This can affect if and how they buy into the decision.

Consulting: This method works in large groups and/or when it would help to have an expert's guidance on a decision. One person has the authority to make the decision but invites group members to give input before making it. This method works best when the group clearly understands its role and how the decision will be made.
- Benefits: If the leader informs group members of the decision and the reasons behind it, they will know that their opinions were taken into consideration. This will help them accept the decision, even if they do not agree with it.
- Drawbacks: As the leader, you must be sincere in consulting with the group. If a decision has already been made and you are only going through the motions of seeking opinions and information, group members may feel betrayed and lose trust.

Consensus: This method works in groups of any size. A group can use consensus-building at any stage of the problem-solving process. It is often the most effective method when group decisions are preferred. Everyone expresses ideas and opinions without feeling judged or threatened. The group reaches consensus when each member can support or at least live with the decision.
- Benefits: This process takes time, but it is a wonderful way to create a sense of ownership and support. The group welcomes differing views as a means of getting more information, clarifying issues, or seeking the best alternative. There are no losers with this process, only winners.
- Drawbacks: It is possible to reach a "false" consensus. This happens when the group interprets silence as consent. You must be careful to get a clear response from each member of the group to make certain the group hears all thoughts.

As a leader you play an important role in bringing a group to consensus, since you set the tone for how things will get done. You can help team members most by emphasizing fact over opinion.
- giving them an appropriate amount of time to work through the issue.
- reminding team members that conflict is an inevitable part of the process.
- letting them know that negotiation and collaboration are expected.
- making certain team members do not give in just to avoid conflict.

Sometimes a group will not achieve consensus. This is a reality of group interaction and it is no one's fault. When this happens, take these steps to get the group moving again.
- Agree to disagree. Move to a related issue. Return to the original issue at another time.
- Change topics for a while.
- Call a recess. Allow things to settle and take up the issue again later.
- Work toward a compromise decision. It may not be the best decision, but it keeps the issue in play.
- Consider alternatives. Voting, for example, can quickly reduce a large number of options while retaining team commitment. Establish these alternatives at the beginning of the process.

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?

Meeting Effectiveness Survey

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

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Seldom   Always

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

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Rarely   Always

3. START TIMES
Do meetings start on time?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Hardly ever   Always

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

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

No time limits set   Always set

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

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Seldom   Often

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

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Not clear   Clearly defined

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

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Nor well suited   Very well suited

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

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Rarely   Always

9. PREPARATION
Does everyone come prepared and ready to make decisions?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Often unprepared   Generally prepared

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

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Constant interruptions   Control interruptions

11. 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   Everyone offers ideas

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

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

The leader makes most decisions   Authority is shared

13. PACE
How would you rate the pace of the meetings?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Poor   Just right

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

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Usually stray off track   Usually stay on track

15. RECORD KEEPING
Are quality minutes kept and circulated?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

No   Yes

16. LISTENING
Do members practice active listening?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

No   Yes

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

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

No used well   Used effectively

18. 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

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

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Abandon consensus   Work hard
too easily   to reach consensus

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

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

No   Yes