

Unit 4



Unit 4 Facilitation Skills

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- Distinguish facilitation from instruction and training
- Identify the competencies linked to effective small group facilitation
- Understand the difference between content and process
- Identify the stages of team development and ways to help teams through each stage
- Use common process tools to make meetings easier and more productive

Unit 4

Dealing with Difficult Dynamics

Mix and Match

Misunderstanding and confusion are normal when a group has to wrestle with difficult issues. Periods of tedium, tension, impatience, and frustration are normal experiences, but they are nonetheless unpleasant.

This is usually the time when the group looks to the facilitator to get them through this difficult patch. Facilitators are asked to control the offending group member or to get the group back on track.

The truth is that in almost every group there are people who we find a challenge to work with.

Big Talkers

The Kidder

Exhausted and Droopy

Not Into It!

Poor Follow-Through on Assignments

Failure of Participants to Arrive/Return from Breaks on Time

Whisperers

12 Easy Ways to Intervene

Give It a Name

Sometimes simply identifying and describing a destructive behavior to the group is enough to change that behavior. Be sure to check for agreement after your process observation.

Examples:

- “You’re not letting John finish his report.”
- “I think you are trying to force a decision before you are ready.”
- “It seems to me that...”

Check for Agreement

Almost any time you make a statement or propose a process, give the group an opportunity to respond. Don’t assume they are with you; take the time to ask.

Examples:

- “Do you agree?”
- “Alright?”
- “Okay?”

A powerful way of checking is to look for the negative. Make silence a sign of confirmation. Rather than saying, “Do you all agree with me?” you could ask:

- “Are there any objections?”
- “If there are no objections, we’ll move on to ...”
- “Is there anyone who can’t live with that decision?”

Avoid Process Battles

Don’t let the group get locked into arguments about what the best way to proceed is. Point out that you can try a number of things to keep things moving along.

Examples:

- “We can try both approaches. Which one would you like to try first?”
- “Can we agree to cover both topics in the remaining time? Okay, which do you want to start with?”

Echo

Don't get backed into answering questions the group should be answering for themselves. Skillfully rebound the question back to the group.

Examples:

- **Group member:** Facilitator, which problem should we deal with first?
- **Facilitator:** That's up to the group. Which do you think we should discuss first?

- **Group member addressing the facilitator:** What was the inflation rate for last year?
- **Facilitator:** Who can answer that question?

- **Group member:** I don't like the track we are taking here.
- **Facilitator:** What do you think we should do? (Avoid being defensive)

Keep the Group on Track

When the group has gotten off track or the discussion has broken down, playing dumb is a way of getting the group to focus on its own process by having to explain it to you. It's a form of boomeranging, and is easy to do when you are really confused.

Examples:

- "Can someone tell me what's going on?"
- "I'm confused. What are we doing now?"
- "Where are we?"
- "I'm lost. I thought we were..."

Hold Them to Their Word

Once the group has agreed to a procedure, your credibility and neutrality may be at stake if you don't enforce that agreement.

Examples:

- "Wait a second. You agreed to do a fishbone diagram, but now you're taking a vote."
- "Harry, please let John finish."
- "Sorry, Beth. I'm afraid your time is up."

Encourage and Compliment

Sometimes, the group may need to be encouraged to keep going until they reach a solution.

- "Could you say more about that?"

- “Please stick with it for a little longer.”
- “Keep going. I think this is useful.”

Deal With/Accept/Legitimize/Defer

It is important to deal with doubt and criticism. One strategy is to **accept** or **legitimize** the group member’s feelings. You could say something like, “You’re not convinced we’re getting anywhere? Perhaps you’re right. How does the rest of the group feel?”

You can also try persuading them to give it more time by saying something like, “Are you willing to hang on for 10 more minutes and see what happens?”

Don’t Be Defensive

If you are challenged, don’t argue or become defensive. Accept the criticism, thank the individual for the comment, and return the issue back to the individual or group.

Examples:

- “I cut you off before you were finished? I apologize. Please continue.”
- “You think I’m pushing too hard?” (Lots of nods) “Thank you for telling me. How would you like to proceed from here?”

Use the Group Memory

The group memory (i.e. agenda or flip chart) can also be used to reinforce many of these interventions and preventions. For example:

- Walking up to the memory item and pointing at the agenda item the group should be dealing with can help refocus the group.
- Getting agreement on content can be supported by writing down or circling the subject to be discussed.

Use Your Body Language

Many of these interventions and preventions can be reinforced, and sometimes even made, by the movement of your body or hands.

Examples:

- Regaining focus by standing up and moving into the middle of the group.

- Enforcing a process argument by holding up your hand to keep someone from interrupting.
- Encouraging someone by gesturing with your hand.

Keep It Simple

The better facilitator you become, the fewer words you will have to use. When you have really done a good job, the group may leave thinking they can do it without you next time. Use your hands, eye contact, and partial sentences to communicate economically.

Examples:

- “I’m sorry. You were saying that...”
- “Could you say that again?”
- “The point you were making was...”

Building Sustainable Agreements

As a group, and as a facilitator, we are often uncomfortable dealing with disagreement. We want to sweep things under the rug, or under the table, and never let them see the light of day. However if issues aren’t discussed at the meeting, you can bet they will be talked about after the meeting, in the washroom, or in the media.

So how do we make sure that all points of view have been considered? Our options can include the items listed below.

Speak from your own perspective.

Specify requirements.

Use the who, what, where, when, why, and how (WWWWWH).

Solicit facts and opinions.

Review starting positions.

Search for unrepresented perspectives.

Raise difficult issues.

Stages of Team Development

The Five Stages

As early as the 1970's, researchers were discovering that groups of individuals working together go through four distinct stages of development. The most famous representation of this model is Tuckman and Jensen's Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing model. Over time an additional stage has been added to reflect the natural end to a group: Adjourning. The stages are similar to human development: infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age.

One of your roles as a facilitator is to help the group grow and develop. Sometimes they are together for a very short time, so you will try to move them to a productive stage as quickly as you can.

Think of how you felt when you learned you were coming to this workshop. While that isn't a perfect example of the other stages of team development, you may see a resemblance between how you felt upon learning you would be in this workshop and how a new group or team member might feel.

Stage One: Forming

At this stage:

- Group members may be anxious, adopt wait-and-see attitude, and/or be formal
- No clear idea of goals or expectations
- They need to get to know one another
- Not sure why they are there

A facilitator can help by:

- Planning introductions and an orientation
- Using icebreakers
- Establishing ground rules
- Determining decision making methods

Stage Two: Storming

At this stage:

- Team members are eager to get going and they may be impatient with delays
- Conflict can arise as people bring different ideas of how to accomplish goals
- People notice differences rather than similarities

- Some members may drop out mentally or physically

A facilitator can help by:

- Modeling appropriate behaviors
- Separating problems from people
- Enforcing ground rules and their role by maintaining control of the process
- Keeping in mind that conflict can be healthy

To move to the next stage, participants have to put the needs of the group ahead of their personal interests.

Stage Three: Norming

At this stage:

- People begin to recognize ways they are alike
- They that they are in this together as a team
- Members get more social
- The team may forget their focus in favor of having a good time

Many groups don't make it to this stage, where there is much more cooperation and understanding than previous stages. **The facilitator should:**

- Be observant of emerging group behaviors
- Encourage the team to express their differences positively
- Help the team to stay focused on their objectives.

Stage Four: Performing

At this stage the team members:

- Are mature
- Understand their roles and responsibilities
- Want more input in processes
- Are self-motivated and self-trained

The transition to this phase happens as a demonstration of high levels of trust. However, the team can be susceptible to “group think,” so a facilitator must observe and ensure that individual ideas are considered. The facilitator must avoid intervening in the process unless the group becomes stuck and begins to flounder, or they regress to a previous stage and erupt in conflict.

Stage Five: Adjourning

At this stage team members are:

- Winding down and saying goodbye
- Setting goals for future work independently and/or as part of new groups

Groups may adjourn because they finish a defined project, because they are no longer challenged, or they may have several newcomers and that shifts the group.

In this phase facilitators can support the group by:

- Celebrating participants` participation
- Describing what`s going on
- Looking for and encouraging contribution from everyone as the group winds down
- Encouraging continued productivity

Group Exercise

Identify the strategies that you can use as a facilitator to help a team work through all five stages of development.

Stage One: Forming

Stage Two: Storming

Stage Three: Norming

Stage Four: Performing

Stage Five: Adjourning

Analysis Tools

As a facilitator, you may find yourselves in situations where you will need to help a group make a decision. Here are two tools commonly used.

SWOT Analysis

As a facilitator, you may want to assess your own ability as a facilitator after these two days. Or you may be working with a group to help them do a strategic plan for the future. Either way, one facilitation tool you may find useful is a SWOT Analysis.

- The S stands for **Strengths**, either of yourself or of the group you are working with. These strengths are usually internal to you or the group.
- The W stands for **Weaknesses**. Once again, this is an analysis of you or your group's challenges, as seen internally.
- The O stands for **Opportunities** and usually identifies external opportunities.
- The T stands for **Threats** and usually identifies external threats to either you or your group.

Example

	<i>INTERNAL</i>	<i>EXTERNAL</i>
<i>P O S I T I V E</i>	<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I am a great public speaker. ● I genuinely connect with people. 	<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I can use some of the skills I learned today to speak more slowly. ● I can try taping myself or practicing in front of my friends.
<i>N E G A T I V E</i>	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I often speak too quickly. ● I sometimes rush through material or meetings. 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● If I am in a stressful situation I might start speaking quickly again.

Force Field Analysis

Use this tool to identify the opposing forces working on a situation. For example, let's say you have low attendance at your meetings. You could use a force field analysis to determine what it is that brings people to the meetings and what forces contribute to them staying home.

Draw a line down the center of a flip chart sheet and on one side identify those forces that bring people to the meeting (helps attendance). On the other side identify what keeps them home (hinders attendance).

Now you may be able to determine which things can be eliminated on the "hinders" side, or which might be added to the "helps" side to increase attendance.

Example

Forces FOR Change

Offer free lunch

Distribute agenda day before

Timing right before lunch, when people usually aren't busy

Forces AGAINST Change

Meetings are on Fridays; people often take day off

Meetings often run late

Agenda not always followed

Meeting Attendance is Low

Further Reading: