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Meeting Facilitation

May, 2011

Strategic Leadership and Change

Organizational Consulting

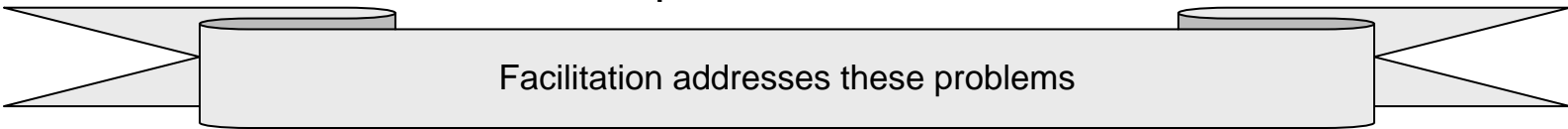
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Why Use Facilitation?

- A typical manager spends a quarter of his or her time in meetings. Surveys suggest that more than half of this time is wasted. Some common problems contributing to this include:
 - No defined goals
 - No agenda
 - Inadequate meeting preparation
 - Going off on a tangent
 - Ineffective leadership and decision-making
 - Dominating individuals
 - No results or follow-up circulated



Facilitation addresses these problems

What Is Facilitation?

- The word “facilitate” literally means “to make easier.” In consulting parlance, it has to come to mean “to manage the process (not the content) of the meeting.”
- It is a **neutral** process designed to help a group:
 - accomplish its objectives
 - maximize involvement
 - generate and sustain energy and momentum
 - surface and deal with conflicts

What Is the Point of This Deck?

- We hope that this document will:
 - Introduce you to the concept of facilitation
 - Prepare you for our three-hour internal facilitation training session
 - Give you a menu of practical insights and techniques to help you navigate the three stages of good facilitation: 1) preparation, 2) working with the group and 3) follow-up
 - Point you toward further sources about facilitation to draw upon if you so choose

Clarifying the Client's Expectations

This is the first in the order of business when beginning a facilitation!

Discuss items such as:

- Why he/she wants to use a facilitator (e.g., to be able to contribute to a meeting outside of leadership role, to manage conflict, etc.)
- What his/her expectations of the facilitation are
- What the objective(s) of the meeting(s) is
- What kind of meeting it is
- Who is expected to attend the meeting
- What the respective roles of the facilitator and the group leader will be
- What the major points at which the client would like updates/further consultations with you are

Make sure that you keep the client "in the loop" *throughout* the facilitation process. If they themselves are attending the meeting, they will want frequent check-ins at breaks

Understanding Context

- Once the client's basic expectations and objectives have been identified, it is time to gather information about the group's participants and their larger organizational context. Useful questions might include:
 - Do all group members share your understanding of the group's goals and your respective roles?
 - Are the right people participating in the group's work? Does anyone else need to be included in the group? Left off the group?
 - What is the organizational history surrounding this group's work? What kind of expectations do participants have of it?
 - How does the group's work connect with the strategy of the entire organization?
 - Do group members know each other? Have they worked together in the past?
 - What non-participants have a stake in the group's work? How should have they been included in or informed of the group's work?

Understanding the context surrounding the group and its work will help you anticipate tensions and obstacles and prepare for them in advance.

“Choreographing” the Meeting

- When making the practical preparations for a meeting, it is helpful to fill out a form that keeps track of the following sorts of information:

Meeting 1					
Merger Integration Group: Marketing 13 July 2001					
Time	Location	Topic of Discussion	Expected Outcomes	Participants	Facilitation Procedure or Process
10:00-10:30	Green Room, Building X, Company Campus	Introductions	Get to know one another	Larry Larchmont, Harriet Higgenbotham, Griselda Grimwold, etc.	“Ice breaker” (from Harry Bleeker’s <u>Facilitating for Dummies</u>)
10:30-12:00	Same	Working Group Purpose & Procedure	Come to a consensus on group objectives and “rules of engagement”	Same	Reading and discussion of pre-distributed statement of objectives (by group leader); “Rules of Engagement” tool (by me)

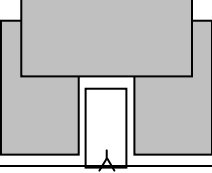

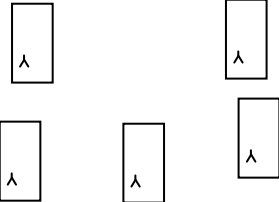
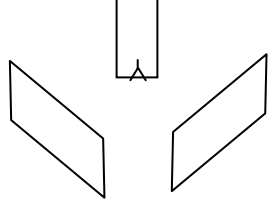
After reviewing it with the client, an abbreviated version of this (not including the Facilitation Procedure or Process column) should be sent to group participants well before the beginning of the meeting, with time allowed for feedback and revision, if necessary.

Meeting Logistics

- Always try and check out the room the group will be meeting in beforehand. Carry out the following checklist.

Meeting Room Checklist	
1. Are there sufficient chairs/space for group members?	<input type="checkbox"/>
1. Are the tables set up correctly?	<input type="checkbox"/>
1. Has AV equipment been ordered and checked?	<input type="checkbox"/>
1. Are there enough flipcharts*, paper, tape and pens?	<input type="checkbox"/>
1. Is it OK to stick charts in the wall, e.g., in a hotel?	<input type="checkbox"/>
1. Is lunch/dinner being served? Find out where and when	<input type="checkbox"/>
1. Are there any distracting noises?	<input type="checkbox"/>
1. Is the room temperature OK?	<input type="checkbox"/>
1. Is water/coffee/etc. available?	<input type="checkbox"/>
1. Find out where people can phone, e-mail, and fax from	<input type="checkbox"/>

Think about the physical setup of the meeting too. This does a lot to set the tone of the working session!

Design	Setup	Advantages	Disadvantages	When to Use
U-Shape		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Centers attention on group task and facilitator Group members are equal and can see one another 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May focus attention excessively on facilitator Movement around the room is hard for facilitator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When it is important for facilitator to command attention and direct activity
Traditional meeting		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> With leader at head, authority and roles are clear Promotes decision-making by leader following recommendations Requires little set-up Familiar design 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficult to break into smaller groups Invites cross-talk opposition Directs energy to leader at head rather than dispersing among members Triggers typical meeting behavioral patterns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traditional meetings i.e. review and approval Meeting time less than 2 hours Dispensing short “news briefs” or “pass down” from above
Large Group Task with Small Table Groups		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows small and large group work without the need for changing seats Easily work in pairs or trios at table 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large room is required Often tables need to be put in center which will obscure view of front 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conferences or retreats Groups of 20-50 When writing surfaces are important Break outs are part of the agenda
Herringbone		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attention focused on group task Small group work can be conducted if people move around table Can add extra rows Works well if a portion of the meeting is up front presentation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Takes up space Places focus on facilitator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Groups of 12-20 When members will spend most of their time as one group Tables cannot be folded or moved Short sessions

Opening the Meeting

- There is a simple secret to setting up a successful meeting.
- Start by agreeing on the **Purpose and Process** of the meeting and the **Ground Rules** that meeting participants will adhere to (agenda review).

From *Agenda* to *Purpose and Process*

Too often, meeting agendas simply list a number of items to be discussed. This does little to lay the groundwork for focused, productive discussion. Better practice is to outline the *purpose and process* of each stage of the meeting, focusing on the outcomes desired at each point.

- In general, there are four main reasons to have a meeting:
 1. To give information... make an announcement
 2. To get information... discover, fact find, collect data, question and answer
 3. To solve a problem... define, generate alternate solutions, pick one, plan action
 4. To gain commitment... persuade, negotiate, sell
- The world would be a simpler place if we could separate these purposes within a typical Monday morning staff meeting, e.g.,
- “O.K., for the first ten minutes I have some announcements to make. During this time I’ll take questions of clarity only. I need to get some information about absenteeism in your sections so each of you will present your data then and we’ll discuss what it means. Then we’ll focus on solving the schedule delays in the XYZ project and we’ll break into a full problem solving mode. O.K.?”

Agreeing on Ground Rules

- Particularly when a meeting is going to cover some controversial ground, it is important:
 1. To get a consensus from participants on the ground rules of behavior in a meeting
 2. To decide how the group will handle deviations from the rules of acceptable behavior (i.e., politely note the infraction, confront it more strongly, fire the egregious offender, execute incorrigibles)
- What is critical in the ground rule agreement is that *everyone* take responsibility for the success of the meeting and the adherence to the ground rules

Sample Ground Rules

- There are some sample ground rules that may prove helpful:
 - **Be present:** not just in body but with mind and spirit entirely focused on the issues at hand
 - **Contribute and encourage contribution:** speak your mind and draw out those reluctant to speak
 - **Actively listen:** not just with your ears but giving visible and audible clues that you are listening (eye contact, “uh-huh”, note taking)
 - **Own your own data:** it’s OK to say “I feel” or “I believe” but not to hide behind “I’ve heard that people feel...”
 - **Say what you mean and mean what you say:** truthfully speak your mind, and don’t commit to things you won’t do
 - **Show respect:** don’t interrupt, don’t belittle anyone; keep humor in, but keep out sarcasm at someone’s expense
 - **Be constructive:** stay solution-focused; build on other’s ideas, don’t tear them down
 - **Spare us the history:** maintain a future focus. In order to remain solution-centered, avoid long-winded war stories about how we used to do it in the Year One
 - **Stay on track:** stick to the agreed process and ground rules, e.g., “We seem to be repeating information now. Have we defined the problem sufficiently such that we could move on to generating solutions?”
 - **Phone messages:** delivered at breaks only
 - **Support decisions made in your absence:** if you miss a session
 - **Attend meetings on time:** call ahead if you know you will be late or will have to leave early
- If everyone takes responsibility for the success of the meeting and enforces these or other agreed ground rules, the meeting will be more satisfactory to all

Facilitating Five Different Kinds of Meetings

- The Announcement Meeting
- The Discovery Meeting
- The Problem-Solving Meeting
- The Decision-Making Meeting
- The Commitment-Building Meeting

Announcement Meeting

Objective:

To give information

Potential Role of the Facilitator



Examples:

- Changes in policy
- Resolutions of conflicts
- Changes in group responsibilities

- We will rarely be asked to facilitate announcement meetings except when the questions are likely to be sensitive
- Then it is important to set up how to ask the questions (format)
- Capture each question precisely as asked (perhaps writing them all on the flipchart first to give you and the client the opportunity to group answers and respond logically)



- Let people know that this is an announcement and what the process will be for questions

Pitfalls



- The announcement and the questions

- Making the announcement the client should make
- Answering the questions yourself or otherwise undermining the client
- Not anticipating questions with the client
- Not agreeing on the process for asking or answering the questions in advance
- Getting defensive yourself or not discussing defensiveness with the client

- Repetition of the high points of the announcement and a summary of questions and any actions required

Objective: To get information

Examples:

- Focus groups
- Group interviews
- Employee input sessions
- Brainstorming and other idea generation techniques

Potential Role of the Facilitator



- We will often be asked to gather data from groups of people
- Most often these meetings are focus groups or group interviews where the single most important role of the facilitator is to be an objective recorder of participant data
- In these situations, it is critical to capture the exact words of the participants and not to paraphrase without the speaker's permission
- Sometimes a client will ask us to gather data from their group including them
- Sometimes these sessions utilize a formal process like brainstorming. Then, stick to the agreed formal process, because adding discipline is often why you are there



- Explanation of why you are gathering this information, what it will be used for, whether the participants will be identified individually, and ground rules for data collection
- Facilitator asks questions, participants respond, facilitator charts answers
- Thanks, summaries, what will happen with the data

Pitfalls



- Shaping the information to a previously determined position
- Not being clear about the rules of data gathering
- Failing to be clear about what will happen to the information

Problem Solving Meeting

Objective: To solve a problem using a formal problem solving meeting

Examples:

- Project trouble shooting
- Obstacle anticipation in a planning process
- Solving a recurring customer problem

Potential Role of the Facilitator



- To keep the group on track with the process (e.g., not jumping to early solutions). Being sure to select according to agreed criteria, test all solutions, anticipate obstacles, etc.
- To be sure that responsibilities are assigned and that a review process is put in place to ensure implementation



- Explanation of the problem solving process and ground rules
- Define the problem
- Gather background detail
- Generate alternative solutions
- Determine solution selection criteria
- Selecting the solution
- Testing the solution
- Planning and scheduling actions and responsibilities

Pitfalls



- Not explaining the process or summarizing contributions, just sticking to the process
- Jumping into the content of solving the problem (consultants love to solve problems)
- Being caught up in the euphoria of “finding” the answer and failing to plan implementation

- Summary of the entire process, highlighting solution, action steps responsibilities, and review process

Decision Making Meeting

Objective: To agree upon a decision

Potential Role of the Facilitator



- This depends on the decision style of the client and the corporate culture
- If the client wants to gather input in a group and later make the decision individually in private, then that should be clear so that the group never moves beyond generating options and trade-offs
- If the client wants to make the decision, they need an agreed process - consensus or majority rule, fact based (cost/benefit) or impact of people (greatest good for the greatest number)
- Agreeing to the process in advance (“how will we make this decision?” or “what does a good decision look like?”) should be a short discussion at the beginning of the session because it is difficult to go back to after people have started discussions from different processes and assumptions
- Misaligning with the goals of the client
- Not agreeing on a decision process
- Jumping to a decision without due evaluation
- Not planning for implementation including roles and responsibilities

- Description of the decision to be made and suggesting/agreeing on a process for making it
- Structured discussion similar to solution selection in problem solving
- Summary of the decision, communication and implementation

Meeting Opening

Meeting Body

Meeting Closure

Some possible models of decision making:

Absolute Consensus: All must agree to support a decision

Consultative: Leader makes decision after listening to advice, ideas, etc.

Consultative Consensus: Leader makes decision after listening to views of members and striving for consensus

Modified Consensus: Group seeks consensus on all items, agreeing to support the decision even though it may not agree with all the decision. Leader is called upon if consensus cannot be achieved to form a decision or postpone item

Voting: Specify the majority required to come to a decision

Pitfalls



Commitment Building Meeting

Objective: To build commitment to an idea, sell a concept, negotiate acceptable compromises

Potential Role of the Facilitator



- This is perhaps the most varied type of meeting and facilitator roles shift dramatically accordingly
- If the meeting is conflict resolution or negotiation, then the process includes a statement of one's own interest and understanding of others'
- If the meeting is to build commitment to a decision that has already been reached, then it is critical to frame questions in a way that keeps the group within their given parameters

Pitfalls



- Lack of clarity about the group tasks
- Forcing false commitment (votes and "so we all agreed, right?" statements)
- Allowing the members of the group to take intractable positions

Meeting Opening

- Clear statement of the group's role
- Ground rules, e.g., how to discuss, how not to discuss (no personal attacks)
- What happens if we can't come to an agreement, etc.

Meeting Body

- Discussion of each element of the subject with a point-counterpoint-compromise type process

Meeting Closure

- Summaries of the agreements and the action steps which derive from there
- Individually closing statements of commitment (what I learned - what I commit to do), but not linking arms and singing Kumbayah

A Few Handy Facilitation Techniques

- Facilitating effective communication and participation
- Recording things in a meeting
- Capitalizing on - not avoiding - disagreement

Bring Out Contributions From More Reticent Group Members



- Invite in generally, i.e., “Let’s hear from some people we haven’t heard from”, and use encouraging eye contact
- Sometimes, it is useful to invite a quiet person’s participation directly; this can make them feel valued and cue others to listen more closely to them
- If soliciting someone’s opinion directly seems like it singles them out too much and the issue is an important one that needs everyone’s participation, you can canvas ideas from each person in turn

Dealing With Difficult Group Members



- Think about whether their behavior is affecting the group’s dynamics adversely. If not, you can let it pass
- If someone’s behavior *is* proving to be lastingly disruptive, they need to be called on it. It is best, generally, to avoid confronting people during the meeting. Talk to the disruptive person one-on-one during a break.
- Remember that, if you’ve done your job, the ground rules have been agreed upon by all. The other group members may reinforce the rules and “self police.” If they do, it doesn’t necessarily mean you’ve done your job badly; in fact, it may signal just the opposite! If you feel the need to confront with disruptive behavior yourself, keep the following in mind:
 - Make sure to *always* be polite. “I notice that you are using about 30% of the group’s airtime [a great word to remember for these purposes]. Can you encourage others to speak?”
 - As much as possible, call attention to *observable, objective* actions a person has taken, rather than loading your observation with subjective judgments about their intent (even if their intent seems pretty obvious to you). Thus, “Joan, your negativity is torpedoing the discussion,” is less good than “Joan, since your comment about X a few minutes ago, the energy level of the group has dropped off sharply.” “Perhaps you should try to pursue things in a more solution-focused way.”

Recording Things in a Meeting

Flipcharts can be used as a memory bank and reference point for the group. They can:

- Be used to bring the group back from a tangent or prevent repetition
- Be a tangible embodiment of people's ideas and participation in the meeting, allowing contributors to relax and listen to others or think of new ideas
- Allow an idea to be evaluated objectively as it is separated from its originator
- Be used as a site for consolidating, reorganizing, and prioritizing data
- A scribe can be nominated from the group. Help them by suggesting some guidelines:



Practical Hints on Using Flipcharts

- Make sure you know how to assemble the flipchart stand quickly
- Write in large, legible print
- Aim to fit 12-15 lines on a sheet. For pages that will be returned to regularly, keep this to 5-6 lines
- Number the sheets to make transcribing easier
- As sheets are filled, post them around the room for the group to see and refer to. Take care not to damage walls (masking tape often works best) and have strips of tape ready to save time. Try attaching the strips to the sheet before tearing it off the pad

Important! Be a trustworthy capturer of people's ideas!

Use the participant's words whenever possible. Listen attentively and look for a key phrases that will summarize the idea. If you are uncertain, ask "does this capture what was just said?"

Parking Lot Boards

Parking lot boards can serve several functions:

Issue List can be used to document issues that the group does not want to forget in cases when it is not the appropriate time in the meeting to address them or when the issues stretch beyond the scope of the meeting

Decisions List can be used to record the decisions made by the group. This demonstrates progress and ensures that steps are not retraced

Actions List records the follow up actions that have been allocated to group members. The public posting of these actions may create accountability amongst group members

Other parking lot boards might include a record of process improvements identified during discussions

Capitalizing On – Not Avoiding – Disagreement

Conflict or disagreement in the group can be an important opportunity to achieve better communication and cooperation. The facilitator's job is to capitalize on that opportunity by ensuring that disagreement is communicated and dealt with *constructively*.

- Allow members time to express and hear different points of view
- If differences are important to the group task, then discuss. Otherwise, have an offline discussion. Keep in mind, however, that seemingly off-topic disagreements *may* conceal deeper, more relevant differences. If you aren't sure whether this is the case, ask!
- Summarize points of conflict (or have some one from the group summarize) in order to help people to identify why they disagree: assumptions, facts, methods, goals, interests, values. Any one of these sources of disagreement is legitimate
- Once you've got people to express why they disagree, help the parties use one or more of the following ways of moving forward on the issue:
 1. If the disagreement boils down to an empirical issue, suggest that they get new data. This should involve a collaboratively designed test to verify the facts and resolve the conflict (whom to speak with, what questions to ask, what data are relevant, how to collect the data, which solutions to pilot). Get the people involved to agree both on the testing method and on using the information that comes from it. This makes it more likely for both people to be internally committed to the outcome
 2. Get the parties to think:
 - "How could it be that we are both correct?"
 - "How could we each be seeing different parts of the same problem?" and
 - "How could we arrive at a solution that suits both of our interests?"

Following Up on the Meeting

- Little else is as destructive of a group's morale and credibility as having its decisions and work disappear into the void, never to be acted on or even heard of again
- Circulate a report on the outcomes of the meeting to participants, taking the time to emphasize progress made and ownership and timing of "next steps." The report should be circulated as soon as possible
- Inform the client of the same information, engaging him/her with requests for resources, sponsorship or advice if necessary
- Keep close track of "next steps," checking in before the date of the next follow-up meeting if possible. Monitor the process and assign management accountability
- Inform participants promptly of external changes and/or decisions that have an impact on the group's work
- Celebrate victories and accomplishments visibly and in an inclusive way!



Transcribe notes from flipcharts

Final Hints

- Here are some hints to keep in mind when preparing to do a facilitation:
 - **Do your homework** at each stage of the process: preparation, working with the group and follow up
 - **Transparency of process**
 - Be clear about outcomes and approach
 - Explain why you do things, e.g., “I ask people to make an opening statement so that we set the norm for equal participation in the meeting”
 - Be clear about what will happen with the information gathered or decisions made after the meeting
 - **Be authentic.** Your objectivity is your best contribution to the process. For example, if you don’t understand some of the content and it is getting in the way of your helping the process along, say so.
 - **When you are in a hole, stop digging.** For example, if you have asked a question that led the group off track, stop, identify the problem, bring the group back on track. Or if the group attacks you and you get defensive, escalating a conflict, stop and explain what you did: “Wait a minute, I guess I’m getting a little defensive here - can someone bring us back on track?”
 - **Don’t be afraid to ask the group for help.** For example, “I just had a mind-blink. Can someone summarize what Bill just said so I can capture it?”

...and, above all...

- **Their needs, not mine!** It is easier to become a good facilitator if one adopts a truly helpful mindset and recognizes, but sets aside, the natural urge to be liked or to control things

Final Hints (Cont'd)

- Practice active listening. Active listening is an art which can be learned
 - Pay attention to the person's body language and be conscious of your own. Maintain an open posture, nod and keep eye contact
 - Concentrate and do not get distracted by planning what you are going to say next before the other person has finished speaking
 - Ask questions to clarify
 - Above all, reserve judgment and aim to fully understand what the other person is saying
- If you are both facilitator and "scribe," frequently turn to the group to maintain eye contact. An alternative would be to ask a member of the group to scribe and rotate the scribe position

Further Resources

- Alan's "Meeting Facilitation"
- Alan's "Meeting Ground Rules"
- Alan's "Core Values"
- HBS article "How Effective at Facilitation Are You?"
- Carl R. Rogers, "The Characteristics of a Helping Relationship"
- Ridge Training Binder
- Fran Rees, *How to Lead Work Teams: Facilitation Skills*

Alan Cay Culler Background and Connections



Alan Cay Culler

- 30+ years delivering business results as a strategic change consultant
- Specializing in Strategic Leadership, Organization Consulting, Process Change Infrastructure, Leadership Group Work Change Teams and Change Agent Development
- Clients in: Airlines, Chemicals, Construction, Manufacturing, Media, Oil & Gas, Pharmaceuticals

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Connected Resources

- Connections to over 25 independent consultants and executive coaches and several small consulting firms
- Specialists in Strategy, Operations, Organization and Change
- Resources in
 - United States and Canada
 - United Kingdom and EU countries
 - Asia, Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan