



APMG-International™
Facilitation

The Value of Facilitation White Paper

The Value of Facilitation

By Tony Mann

The purpose of this paper

This paper outlines the importance of facilitation as a key, generic skill in all sectors of the economy. It proposes that people need to develop the skills to be able to facilitate successfully in any context. These skilled facilitators should be accorded similar status to that of project managers.

Thus, there should be opportunities for facilitators to be trained, assessed and certified in a similar way to project managers.

APMG, which has been involved in improving Change and Portfolio, Programme and Project Management for over 15 years, has wide ranging experience in accrediting training organizations, their trainers and their training programmes as well as accrediting consulting organizations and their registered specialist management consultants. It is well placed to offer a similar range of services with regards to facilitation.

Setting the scene

At present, times are tough financially and commercially. They also challenge our values and emotions.

Organizations and their people face hard decisions in managing change. There are essentially two – opposing – philosophies to making these decisions.

One emphasises the leader as the person who knows best and feels it's her/his responsibility to tell others what should happen. To avoid conflict and challenge from the people they manage, it's easier and less confrontational to 'tell' those people 'the way forward'.

The other approach is, admittedly, more difficult but more inclusive. It asks questions and engages people. With appropriate leadership, teams, groups, stakeholders and even whole communities can be encouraged to be participative.

There is a strong moral and financial rationale to involve and engage people who will be affected by big decisions. This can be brought about by effective facilitation.

People who develop this craft of facilitation could offer organizations the appropriate approach to use in tough situations. They could add real value to organizations and the economy as a whole. Under guidance from a skilled facilitator, meetings and workshops will achieve the desired outcomes with speed and efficiency.

Management teams using a collaborative, facilitative style are discovering that, performed appropriately, facilitation can deliver outcomes in an effective, timely and constructive way that won't compromise on key issues.

Facilitation

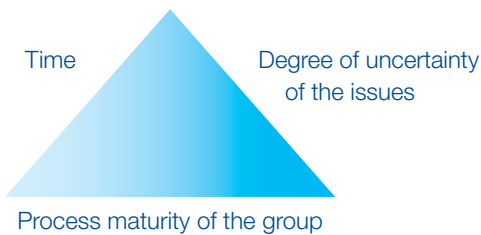
Facilitation is a basic life skill that can be used – profitably – to:

- identify issues
- resolve problems
- encourage productive interaction
- develop accurate objectives
- define the scope of change projects
- encourage and empower contributions in a safe, non-threatening environment
- engage stakeholders.

Facilitation can support organizations, enabling people to work in a collaborative, participative way to tackle key issues and make fundamental decisions. Effective facilitation can make the difference between a poor and a brilliant decision. It can make the difference between a solution that has hidden problems and one that is robust.

Facilitators

A facilitator provides a method and a means to deliver answers to complex issues in an operational context without necessarily being a subject matter expert. S/he needs to balance time, the degree of uncertainty of the issues and the process maturity of the organization/group - and help the task leader to find the best possible process.



Facilitators must use the right model/tool in the right place to get the most helpful answer, allowing groups to make decisions and reach a lasting, robust agreement which has commitment and buy-in. They must understand the continuum of decision-making and change which identifies the best tool or technique to use depending on the seriousness/significance of the decision/situation, the time factor and the need for the workforce - emotionally and mentally – to commit to the decision.

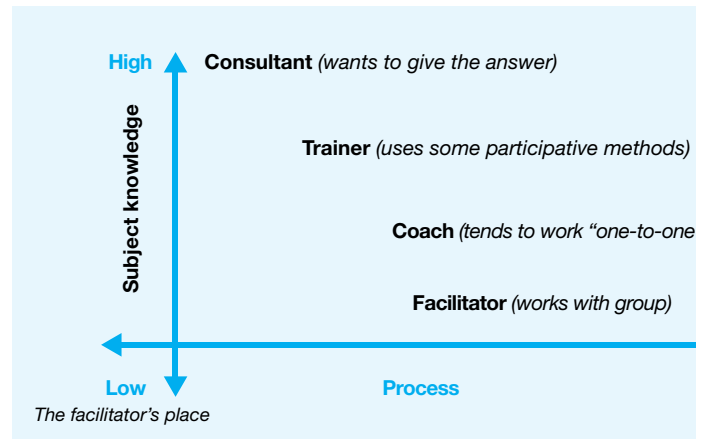
Facilitators need to build a comprehensive catalogue of:

- Approaches
- Models
- Tools
- Techniques

They use these to help groups take appropriate decisions for different levels of:

- Uncertainty
- Emotional disruption
- Urgency
- Need for buy-in
- Organizational maturity

This gives organizations an effective participative change management toolkit. Moreover, they can use facilitation as a core management skill and, potentially, as a core process within the organization.

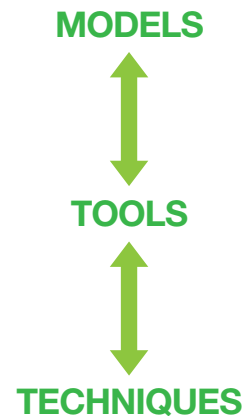


The facilitator is always:

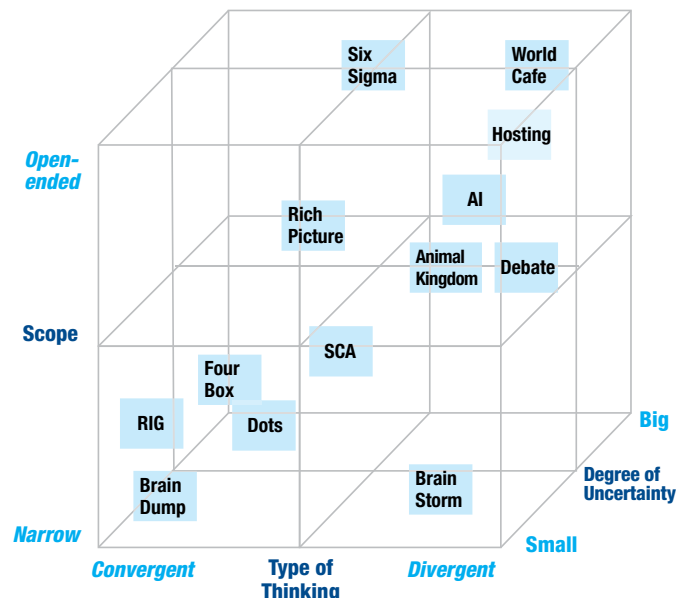
- Active, striving to keep the momentum going
- Checking understanding so that people are engaged
- Selecting the appropriate model or tool to take things forward

Models, tools and techniques

Having selected the most appropriate format, the facilitator can focus on the most appropriate models, tools and techniques to employ.

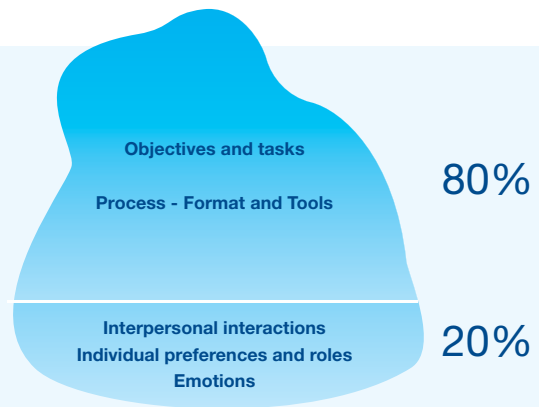


Facilitators can use a three-dimensional framework to systematize the various models, tools and techniques.



Tony Mann's 'Process Iceberg® Meeting Model' illustrates that, if a facilitator can find and use the appropriate objectives and tasks, along with the process (format and tools), then 80 per cent of the group's problems disappear. According to this model, there are no difficult people, only ill-defined tasks and processes.

Planning a meeting: the Process Iceberg Model



Objectives and Tasks

Any objective can be divided into sub-elements, which further delineate the nature of the task:



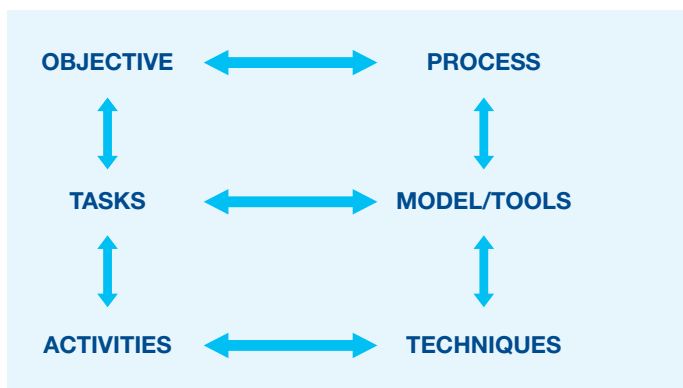
The Task is the issue facing the group. This does not constitute process. Task and process are symbiotically connected but fundamentally different. In addition to a group defining the task, it needs to identify *how* to tackle it.

Facilitators and task leaders

In any use of facilitation, there are task issues (the task leader's responsibility) and process methods (the facilitator's responsibility). The facilitator should have an ally in the task leader – that is, the person responsible for the event's success.

As each task is defined, that task's objective is identified. This is linked to an appropriate (facilitation) process to achieve this objective. This process is a combination of tools, techniques and format.

Since facilitators work with processes, not tasks, they help the group deliver the task outcomes. So, tasks, objectives and activities, along with facilitation tools/ techniques, models and processes are inter-linked, thus:



The links between tasks, objectives, activities, along with facilitation tools/techniques, models and processes.

Task leaders have an implied contract with the group they lead. This tends to fall into one of four categories:

Sell High task High relationship	Participate Low task High relationship
Tell High task Low relationship	Delegate Low task Low relationship

The task leader's contract with the group: four main options

Red and Green Thinking

Task and process can be differentiated by viewing things to do with task as being red thinking and those things to do with process as being green thinking. The task leader (living in the 'red') and facilitator (operating in the 'green') should never merge. Merging these roles results in 'falipulation', where the group is manipulated via facilitation to achieve the results that the task leader/ facilitator wanted rather than those the group would have produced had it been free to do so.

The red zone – the task leader's prerogative – covers the agenda process of defining objectives, tasks and the degree of uncertainty. The green zone – the facilitator's responsibility – involves defining the process, time available and preparation. There must be clarity between the two, however the two are symbiotic and will run in parallel.

The degree of uncertainty

In defining the objectives and tasks, task leaders must account for the degree of uncertainty involved. There can be:

- **Certainty:** the issue is clear and the answer can be easily obtained from the people in the group.
- **Complexity:** the issue is relatively clear but the appropriate solution must be developed.
- **Uncertainty:** even the nature of the issue, problem or question is unclear, so it must be defined and clarified. Only then can a solution be explored.

Process

Process – the means of production – takes raw materials (ideas) and turns them into a finished product (decisions) with the minimum of waste (effort) through the maximization of the resources (people’s time) available.

Process awareness

A group goes through three stages:

- **Dysfunctional.** There is strong leadership and the group’s agenda is set.
- **Transitional.** The group begins to use different formats and procedures to increase its flexibility. Interactions within the group increase and the group begins to take an active interest in the process.
- **Process Aware.** The group recognizes uncertainty and adapts the process to cope with this. Individuals take responsibility for the process.

The group moves from being dysfunctional to transitional initially by the leader relinquishing control to the process. The facilitator engenders in the group a willingness to try different techniques. The group then begins to recognize the part that process plays in achieving an effective outcome – and how much time is needed.

The group moves from being transitional to process aware as it uses appropriate techniques to tackle the task and resolves to be willing to work in complexity – not avoid it.

Format

Format is the application of people to process. There are four, fundamental facilitation formats:

- **All** – each person works on her/his own, so no one is influenced by anyone else.
- **Group** – working in subgroups to examine different issues or give different perspectives on the same issue.
- **All to one** – everyone does the activity, directing their outputs to one person.
- **One to All** – one person does the activity to, or on behalf of, everyone so everyone knows what needs to be known.

Each of these approaches has advantages and disadvantages:

FORMAT	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
ALL	Everyone gets an opportunity to input their ideas/thoughts/ perceptions	It takes more time to collate the input from everyone and “cluster”/ analyse it
ALL TO ONE	There is an opportunity to “bounce” off others thoughts and it takes less time to elicit the thoughts/ideas	The opinion of individuals can be lost and the opinion of one or two people can hold sway
GROUP	The opinion of different or “constituencies” can be developed or cross-cutting groups can be provided a mix of opinions/perceptions	The group format still needs another format to make it effective (eg ALL)
ONE TO ALL	There is an opportunity to save time and effort by getting expert input	If the expert isn’t well directed it can turn into a “solo” self-centred presentation

Selecting the appropriate format depends on the time available and the group’s level of process awareness.

Each of these formats produces a different outcome and either supports the process or works against it. The rationale for using each format is:

FORMAT	RATIONALE
ALL	This approach is used when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - there are dominant people in the group and you want people to work independently, free of others’ influence - you want everyone’s own thoughts/ideas /input
ALL TO ONE	This approach is used when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - you want cross fertilization of ideas - there is no danger of dominations by individuals
GROUP	This is used when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - there are different constituencies in the room and you want to reflect different perspectives
ONE TO ALL	This is used when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - there is an expert in the room who can steer the group by giving their expert input (first)

Process tools

Two simple tools – among many – to help a group focus on ‘process’ are:

■ The Feedback Model:

1. Misunderstanding or misinterpreting (unintentionally) what was said
2. Missing out some important points or details
3. Feeding back accurately and fully what was said
4. Getting behind the message’s words

People often express half-baked opinions, ideas and thoughts not because they are incompetent but, rather, because the task is uncertain. Ensuring effective feedback can help the individual and the group uncover the real issues and fashion new ideas.

■ Summarize – Propose – Outcome/ Output (SPO).

This is powerful because it:

- o Connects ‘red’ and ‘green’
- o Demonstrates the significance of ‘green’ in tackling the task
- o Allows the group to take responsibility by enabling it to challenge the S, P or O and, thus, become more aware of process thinking
- o Introduces models, tools and techniques in context and demonstrates their appropriate use
- o Gives anyone the ability to introduce process

Using a Systematic Task/Process Approach

Management decisions can go awry because of failure to take into account all the stages of situational analysis and solution finding. Effective facilitation mirrors the Six Sigma approach and provides 'process' to support a nine-step approach:

- 1 Identify Issues** – suspending judgement about causes
- 2 Focus on the Main Issue(s)/Causes(s)** – having identified all the issues, you can identify the key ones
- 3 Define the Problem** – to ensure that everyone works to the same agenda
- 4 Find the Main Causes**
- 5 Select the Criteria for an Effective Solution**
- 6 Generate Ideas for Potential Solutions** – some are:
 - o Adaptive – rather than taking the problem away, find a way around it
 - o Corrective – correct aspects of the process to solve the problem
 - o Preventative – ensure that it can't happen again
- 7 Pinpoint the Most Appropriate Solution**
- 8 Adverse Consequences** – a solution may solve a problem but cause another
- 9 Action Planning** – plan the implementation of the solution

Conclusions

The need for high quality facilitation to enable and empower organizations to operate efficiently and effectively has never been greater.

Organizations are under constant pressure to become more competitive and/or provide greater value for money for their stakeholders. There is a strong moral reason to discover and gauge the views of the workforce/community where they are personally involved in resolving issues. Moreover, the positive engagement of the workforce produced by effective facilitation adds value to organizations in all sectors of the economy.

Effective facilitation enables organizations to be successful in tackling issues that are uncertain. It will help them handle emotions and challenges to people's core values.

Thus, the whole economy should benefit from this since, under the guidance of accredited/ certified facilitators, meetings and workshops will achieve their desired outcomes in a timely, constructive way.

This strategy requires organizations to embed facilitation as part of the business culture and in so doing deliver best practice, increase competitiveness and buy-in.

One of the key ways to manage and embrace this change in approach to facilitation is to invest in structured and accredited facilitation.

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