

THE FACILITATOR'S POCKETBOOK

2nd Edition

By John Townsend & Paul Donovan

Drawings by Phil Hailstone












“John and Paul provide a quick route to a practical understanding of facilitation. This book should be compulsory reading for all managers handling change.”

Teresa Kilmartin, Executive Manager Training & Development, Irish Life Assurance plc

“This book is the perfect illustration of what facilitation is all about – making things easy. Reflecting on the methods, skills and techniques described, it is easy to understand what it takes to become a skilled facilitator. Read it and you will undoubtedly do it better and get better results!”

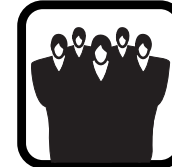
Karin Priarollo, Director, Human Resources, Novartis Consumer Health

CONTENTS

	INTRODUCTION Definition, typical situations, the facilitator's role	5		INTERPERSONAL SKILLS Questioning, listening, giving feedback, conflict handling	75
	PLANNING THE FACILITATION SESSION The three phases of facilitation: current situation, identifying issues/problems, finding solutions/action plan	9		SOLUTION FINDING TECHNIQUES Brainstorming, causes & solutions, critical mass, this time next year, greenfield site, must have/nice to have, time beam, transporter, pluses, minuses & interesting facts, eureka, talking wall, vernissage, force-field analysis	87
	CASE STUDY Example of a 3-phase facilitation session	31		HELPFUL ATTITUDES & VALUES My mind-set won't help them, unconditional positive regard, OK to teach, no one best way, people never argue with their own data, facilitators can't win arguments, silence is OK, don't push the river	101
	FACILITATION SESSION TEMPLATES Customer complaints, training transfer, raising money for charity, staff turnover, reward system, absenteeism	47		THE KNOWLEDGE BASE Learning styles, four phases of team development, NLP, dissonance and self-justification, locus of control, unfreeze-move-refreeze, bases of power, definitions of organisational development and culture, self-fulfilling prophecy	111
	FACILITATION METHODS Facilitraining rainbow, process monitoring, brainstorming, facilitating discussion, Socratic direction, teaching, demonstrating, presenting	55		REFERENCES & FURTHER READING	122
	SESSION SKILLS Setting the scene, stimulating interest, valorising participants, seeking consensus, provoking controversy, essential and non-essential contributions, recognising commonality, revitalising the group, orienting the group to action, summarising	65			

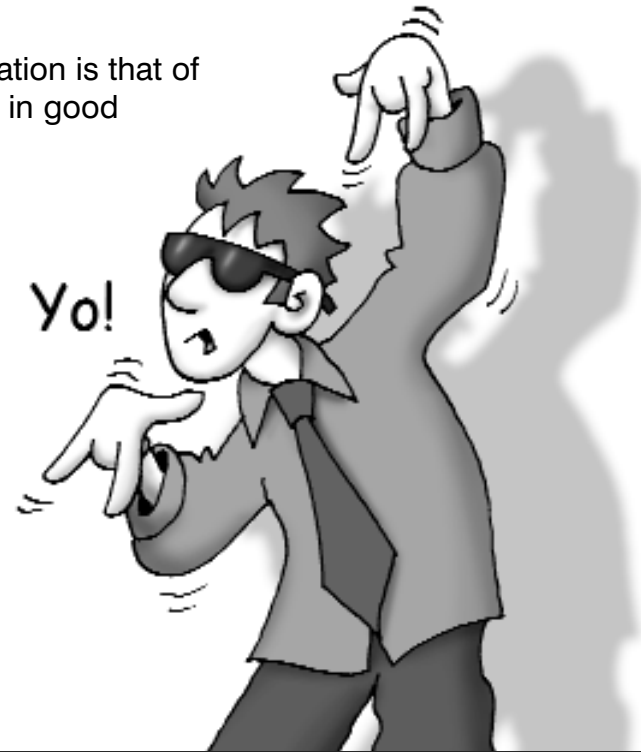
SESSION SKILLS

SETTING THE SCENE



The first skill needed by a facilitator in any situation is that of making people feel that they are welcome and in good hands. You demonstrate this skill when you:

- Engage in useful small talk
- Build rapport by linking to participants' experiences
- Describe objectives in a way that appeals to everyone
- Establish credibility by connecting to participants' concerns/jargon, etc



SESSION SKILLS

STIMULATING INTEREST & CURIOSITY

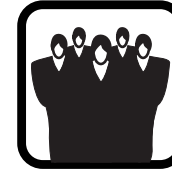


Facilitation means making it easy for people to discuss and decide. They will only discuss and decide if they are motivated to do so. This means that a good facilitator will:

- Phrase discussion and focus questions that are inviting (see pages 18 to 20 and 23)
- Supply attractive processes with which to analyse and solve problems (see pages 88 to 98)

SESSION SKILLS

VALORISING PARTICIPANTS



In all participant-led facilitation sessions a key skill is to make the attendees all feel **valued**. This is what we mean by 'valorise'.

In order to accomplish this, the facilitator must:

- Adopt 'unconditional positive regard' for all participants – it's **their** session after all
- Boost quieter individuals' confidence by encouraging their contributions
- Build on people's suggestions
- Banter with extroverts



SESSION SKILLS

SEEKING CONSENSUS

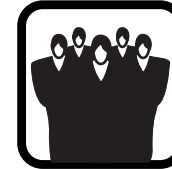


Consensus is not when everyone agrees but when they agree to agree! In order to help a group reach consensus, the professional facilitator will:

- Identify points of agreement
- Reformulate contributions to highlight common ideas
- Explore people's objectives
- Encourage people to build on others' ideas
- Test false consensus due to conformity (is agreement real?)
- Test consensus for relevance to objective
- Test consensus for underlying motivation (is agreement biased in any way?)

SESSION SKILLS

PROVOKING USEFUL CONTROVERSY



Philosophers refer to 'Thesis/Antithesis/Synthesis'. Useful controversy means looking at both sides of a problem before deciding what to do. Professional facilitators do this when they:

- Phrase challenging questions (see page 76)
- Supply 'reframing' and/or creative solution-finding techniques (see pages 88 to 98)

They will also be skilled at dealing with the inevitable conflict which controversy brings and will:

- Reassert agreed ground rules on interpersonal behaviour
- Help the group 'be tough on the problem but not on the people'



SESSION SKILLS

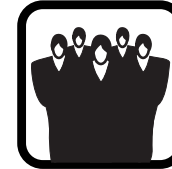


DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN ESSENTIAL & NON-ESSENTIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

This is one of the most important and yet the most difficult facilitation skills. It's obviously easier when the facilitator knows the participants and their problem inside out. However, this is often not the case. In fact, it's more often the opposite. The facilitator is called in precisely because he or she does not know the content/subject matter and can, therefore, remain neutral. So we must:

- Constantly relate contributions to session objectives
- Monitor participants' body language for significant reactions to contributions and to people (What do **they** seem to think is essential? Whom do **they** seem to take most seriously during discussions?)
- Monitor group behaviour for clues to organisational pressure on decisions (What do **they** seem to think is important for the organisation? Whom do they listen to/agree with most?)

SESSION SKILLS



RECOGNISING COMMONALITIES, THEMES & TRENDS

The whole idea of facilitation is to build on common ground, to build consensus, to build decisions. A key skill for this is to recognise what **is** common ground. Experience is the best teacher here so, when in doubt as to whether there is commonality:

- Explore people's intentions and key concerns by asking for clarification to help your growing hypotheses
- Listen for frequently used words and phrases from different people which imply that consensus is building (or not!)

SESSION SKILLS

REVITALISING THE GROUP

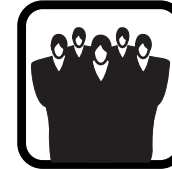


From time to time even the best facilitated sessions run out of steam. A good facilitator will recognise these dips instantly and react quickly to:

- Supply energisers
- Refocus on the value of the discussion
- Bring people into the discussion who seem to be drifting
- Engage people who had useful contributions earlier but maybe now think they have nothing to add



SESSION SKILLS



ORIENTING THE GROUP TO ACTION

Too many facilitation sessions end when everyone ‘feels good’ rather than when a decision has been made. Since the objective of any facilitation session is to reach an objective, the facilitator will:

- Brainstorm action options
- Supply useful prioritisation techniques
- Supply decision-making methods
- Help the group to phrase decisions
- Assist in allocating tasks and responsibilities

Summarising

At the end of every session a good facilitator will:

- Recap the chronology of the session
- Highlight the key consensus items
- Reiterate the action plan

About the Author

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John has built a reputation internationally as a leading trainer of trainers. He is the founder of the highly-regarded Master Trainer Institute, a total learning facility located just outside Geneva which draws trainers and facilitators from around the world. He set up the Institute after 30 years' experience in international consulting and human resource management positions in the UK, France, the United States and Switzerland.

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Many thanks to Richard Bradley of The Master Training Institute for helping these tips and techniques come alive in Train the Trainer courses for participants from all over the world. You can contact Richard at: richard@mastertrainer.ch or www.mt-institute.com

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