
The Mathis Group's Messenger

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Facilitating Through Conflict

Last month we began looking at what qualities a successful facilitator possesses and how to begin a facilitation meeting. This month we will finish looking at how to conduct a meeting and handle conflict.

To get an overall picture of what is going on, everyone must participate in the discussion. When you have only a handful of people interacting, you won't be able to have a complete representation of all thoughts. Having everyone involved may require a reduction in the size of the group. If there are too many people, nothing is going to get accomplished. If cutting down the size is not possible, try placing the group in teams and have them brainstorm possible ideas or solutions. Each team can then present their consensus. It is your job to include everyone. Direct questions to those who are not participating. It may take mentioning the lack of input by some to make them speak up.

As you're listening to all that is being said, watch everyone for non-verbal mannerisms. Communication is more than just what is said, but how it is said. Watch the body language of the person speaking and of the others listening. When a person does not like what he or she is hearing, he or she will often become tense. Take notes about everything you observe in case it needs to be addressed in the future. Also, if a client mentions something three times, it's an issue. If several people use the exact same language, it's an issue. Take note of this as well.

Initial resistance is expected at the beginning of the meeting. Neither side is going to give up their position easily or quickly. When you see resistance rear its ugly head,

you may have to say something. First, simply mention the resistance you are noticing. It's possible that the group doesn't realize what is going on. Ask participants to explain/detail the resistance. Given the opportunity to express his or her thoughts may be enough to stop the resistance. A mini discussion on the issue or issues may be needed. If so, do one issue at a time.

It is inevitable that during the meeting at least one major conflict or disagreement will arise. You should strive to avoid conflict at any cost. Conflict only serves to make the entire facilitation process take longer and create hard feelings between parties. Do everything within your power to keep the peace. As the facilitator, it is your job to keep the discussion flowing and move away or defuse "hot" topics. If the group must "fight it out", make sure that everyone argues the position and doesn't bring emotion into the mix. Before the meeting even begins, it is a good idea to have already created a process for reducing and solving conflict.

At times, if the conflict gets heated enough, you may have to intervene. Before doing so, here are some questions to consider.

1. If I do nothing, will it go away?
2. Is this serious enough to invest the time?
3. Is the intervention worse than the issue?

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*Which is stronger, my urge to grow or
my resistance to change?
Mark D. Erickson*



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4. Is there enough respect and trust for the facilitator?
5. Is the intervention going to create fallout which will hurt the meeting?

If, after answering these questions, you still feel like you should intervene, do so with caution and thought. Make sure that anything you say will not be adding fuel to the fire.

Once an acceptable agreement has been reached, it is finally time to end the facilitating session. Make this a joyous time, not one in which one side feels defeated. Detail the accomplishments that were made. Everyone should take pride in the fact that a consensus was reached. Point out the plan of action. Confirm that everyone understands and is still on board with the agreement that was made. Set up agenda issues for a future meeting. Ensure that there is a plan of action for the necessary process to be successful. Create a follow-up reporting process. Let everyone know that their input, even after the meeting, is important. While the agreed upon steps are being carried out, ensure there is a way to let people report if the plan is being implemented successfully or if changes need to be made.



Merry Christmas!

**The Mathis Group
would like to wish
you a very merry
and blessed
Christmas season!**

When necessary, facilitation is an extremely beneficial tactic to solve an issue. Knowing what is expected of the facilitator and the proper steps to take will help ensure that the outcome will be successful.



**Congratulations to our VP of Marketing,
Kim Tull, and her husband, Mike, on the birth
of their daughter.**

Zoe Grace

September 11th

8 pounds 9 ounces 21 inches



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