
The Mathis Group's Messenger

Vol. 6 No. 11

November, 2008

Successful Facilitation

When major disagreements arise within an organization, a facilitator is sometimes needed to help work things out. A facilitator is one who works with a group of people to help make it easier to resolve a situation. Facilitation is very beneficial because issues are discussed thoroughly. Problems are often solved at the root level--not just on the surface. Team members are able to discuss and create plans as experts.

During each facilitation meeting, there is always a clear direction or objective. There is a lot less "rabbit chasing" and a more focused approach to the topic. The facilitator works to involve everyone into the conversation. The facilitator also ensures that all decisions are carried out and supported after the meeting has ended.



The facilitator's role during each session is important to keep everything on track. He or she must have strong communication skills and the ability to expose the real issue at hand while remaining neutral. Negotiation skills are a must when coming to a consensus with which everyone can agree. Patience is a virtue when it comes to facilitation. He or she must avoid going for the quick solution to the surface problem rather than dealing with the root problem. Keeping balance during the meeting is necessary so that everyone's voice can be heard and not attacked. He or she must be prepared to guide the meeting with a plan and structure.

There are also a few things, however, that can lead to a facilitator's downfall or discredibility.

- Allowing people to run over each other
- Forgetting to verify group's decision
- Showing a lack of active listening
- Pushing his/her own opinions
- Ridiculing ideas and options

- Demonstrating no assertiveness
- Discussing a topic too long
- Making jokes on very serious topics

Avoiding these mistakes will increase your chances at successfully arriving at an agreeable conclusion.

Now that we've seen what it takes to be a facilitator, let's look at how to begin the facilitation meeting. On the day of the session, arrive early to set up the room. Once everyone has arrived, set the tone by giving an agenda. Make any introductions necessary and point out the goal of the session. Detail the rules of the meeting, process to be used, and any time constraints. When setting the ground rules for the meeting, be sure that everyone understands the following rules:

- Only one person speaks at a time.
- Seek to understand another's point.
- No sidebars during the meeting.
- Egos and positions are checked at the door.
- Stay alert to the topic being discussed.
- Say what you really mean.
- Demonstrate mutual respect.
- Be open to discussing new possibilities.

Now that you know what's expected of you and have laid out the guidelines for everyone else, it's time to begin the meeting. Using brainstorming techniques is one way to start working the problem. There are five main brainstorming methods.

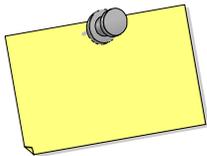
(continued on page 2 Successful Facilitation)

If you don't do something, nothing is going to get better.
Nathaniel Branden
Psychologist

The Mathis Group's Messenger

(continued from page 1 *Successful Facilitation*)

1. Round Robin--Each person gives one idea for the topic.
2. Free Wheeling--Ideas are generated allowing each person to give as many as possible.
3. Paper Style--Post-it notes, index cards, or strips of paper are used with one idea being written on each.
4. Idea Generation Prize--Ideas are generated as fast as possible from each member.
5. Anonymous--Ideas are written and collected, but each person can remain anonymous.



Analyzing the type of group with which you are working will help you know which brainstorming method will be the most effective.

Another technique to work the situation is to begin asking questions. Questions engage the audience and ensures that everyone is involved in the process. This can be used to draw out every idea and opinion. Questions can also be used to direct the conversation to stay on topic or gain clarity of an issue.

Asking questions

Two are types of asking questions: open-ended and closed-ended. Open-ended questions cannot be answered by yes, no, or one word answers. Closed-ended questions are direct and clear up details and anchor decisions.

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is used to make sure a point is clear. It normally involves changing what has been discussed into your own words. It helps clarify understanding and explains a point.

Probing

Probing is used to gain more information or data. It can help get a conversation going.

Redirecting

Redirecting is used when questions have been asked of the facilitator that really need to be answered by others. This can be used when a group or person is trying to

dominate the meeting or to gain input from those attendees who are not talking.

Bridging

Bridging is used to move a conversation along. Its most common use is to close out an activity or event and introduce the next.

Summarizing

Summarizing is a technique used to briefly close or discuss numerous points or issues. It does not always need to be completed by the facilitator. Others can summarize. Summarizing is used to help people catch up on the topic or process being used.

Next month we will look at how to be an effective facilitator.



Check out our exciting
courses at
[www.themathisgroup.com!](http://www.themathisgroup.com)

- Tough-Minded Facilitation*
- Effective Problem Solving*

Contact The Mathis Group today to receive our catalog
of complete course listings or to discuss your
customized onsite seminar.

The Mathis Group, Inc.

Dr. Keith Mathis

106 Lakeview Woods

Eureka, MO 63025

1-800-224-3731

636/938-5292 voice/fax

keith@themathisgroup.com

www.themathisgroup.com

www.pmexpertlive.com

www.trainthegov.com

GSA Contractor- GS10F0383M

Project Management Institute R.E.P.