

Facilitation Skills

Empowering groups to grow

Eric Garner



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FACILITATION SKILLS

EMPOWERING GROUPS TO GROW

Facilitation Skills: Empowering groups to grow

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PREFACE

Introduction to Facilitation Skills

Writer Timothy Gallwey was once asked what the most important word in the management dictionary was and he answered that it was “let”. Not any of the more familiar words, such as “money”, “resources”, or “profit”. But a word that is the opposite of one of the early definitions of “management” as “the control and marshaling of resources”. Letting people act is, for traditional managers, a frightening concept and brings with it the fear that people will do nothing and not perform. But this fear is nearly always unfounded. When people are managed and led in ways that bring out their potential as individuals and groups, they can perform in much better ways than when you do it all for them. This is the promise of facilitation.

In this book, you’ll learn more about what facilitation is and why it is a much better approach to leading groups than controlling, telling, and manipulating. You’ll learn why it’s OK to let a group have control over what they do and where they want to go. We’ll explain a range of techniques that you can use to bring out the best in a group. And we’ll teach you how to read a group’s energy and go with it rather than struggle against it. If you are new to facilitation, the skills, tips, and techniques in this book will open up a new world of managing to you, one that you’ll use again and again and again.

Profile of Author Eric Garner

Eric Garner is an experienced management trainer with a knack for bringing the best out of individuals and teams. Eric founded ManageTrainLearn in 1995 as a corporate training company in the UK specialising in the 20 skills that people need for professional and personal success today. Since 2002, as part of KSA Training Ltd, ManageTrainLearn has been a major player in the e-learning market. Eric has a simple mission: to turn ManageTrainLearn into the best company in the world for producing and delivering quality online management products.

Profile of ManageTrainLearn

ManageTrainLearn is one of the top companies on the Internet for management training products, materials, and resources. Products range from training course plans to online courses, manuals to teambuilder exercises, mobile management apps to one-page skill summaries and a whole lot more. Whether you're a manager, trainer, or learner, you'll find just what you need at ManageTrainLearn to skyrocket your professional and personal success.

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1 WHAT IS FACILITATION?

The traditional role of the manager was to be the all-knowing, all-doing, all-being leader of the group. Where he or she led, the group followed. Today, things are different. Instead of leaders with all the answers, the modern business world needs leaders who can get others to deliver the answers. Instead of using the group to do their bidding, modern leaders need the group to be creative, productive, and self-directing. Today, every leader also needs to be a facilitator.

1.1 BELONGING TO GROUPS

Although we have individual identities as people, our lives are determined and influenced by the groups we belong to. At any one time, we will belong to groups in our personal and social lives, groups when we go to work, and informal ad-hoc groups at work to get special tasks done. As Bernard Livegoed says, “This is the age of the group.”

1.2 LIKING AND DISLIKING GROUPS

We both like and dislike belonging to groups. When groups meet our needs, then we will join them and stay happily with them. Psychologist Abraham Maslow described these needs as a hierarchy ranging from basic and safety needs, needs for social contact and peer group appreciation, and the need to accomplish things we couldn't do alone. That doesn't mean to say we will only meet these needs through belonging to groups. When we believe that the group we belong to won't fulfil these needs, we will pull back from the group and go it alone.

1.3 GROUP DEVELOPMENT

In the workplace, the primary role of the group is a task-based one. The group exists because it is the quickest and best way to get all the jobs done. In non-team groups, this happens when individuals work on their own under the overall umbrella of the group. In team-focused groups, this happens when people join forces and work together. When groups work as teams, two further things happen. First, working together creates a new dynamic in which people learn, grow and develop from being with one another. Second, working together

creates a synergy in which the team outcomes are greater than the individual outcomes. In short, groups which work as teams are more creative, more enjoyable, and more productive.

1.4 GROUP LEADERSHIP

The development of groups as teams rarely happens by itself. The key ingredient for turning groups into teams is leadership. But this only happens when certain factors are present. For example, if the group is led as a “talking-shop” group in which there is no interaction between the group members, only individual contributions, then it is unlikely to become a team. Similarly, if the group is kept under the tight control of the leader, doing what the leader wants, and not what the group wants, it is unlikely to become a team. To create and lead a team to its full potential, the leader must facilitate the team’s development.

1.5 UNDERLYING BELIEFS ABOUT OTHERS

There are a number of underlying beliefs that facilitators have about people without which facilitation cannot become fully effective. These beliefs include the following:

- a. each person is to be valued for who they are
- b. each person has it in them to become an aware, growing, and fulfilled individual
- c. the route to personal and team growth is not always easy
- d. the journey to growth can be made easier (“facilitated”) by others and by the particular actions of a facilitating leader.

1.6 UNDERLYING BELIEFS ABOUT GROUPS

There are a number of underlying beliefs that facilitators have about the value of working with others in groups. These beliefs include the following:

- a. groups can both restrict and enhance an individual’s ability to do a job well
- b. groups can be the basis of some of the most meaningful relationships at work
- c. groups do not grow smoothly in a straight line, but meet blocks along the way
- d. only through people-centred approaches can the potential of the group be fully realised.

1.6.1 LEADING A GROUP

All groups need leaders of one form or another. While leaders may emerge from the group, it is impossible to be an effective leader and an effective group member.

Leaders play different roles in non-facilitative groups:

- talking-shop groups. In these groups the leader is only interested in collecting ideas from the group. There is no development of the group as an entity.
- manipulating groups. In these groups, the leader may pretend that he or she is interested in the ideas of the group but is really using his or her position and power to direct the group to accept a pre-ordained outcome.
- control groups. In these groups, the leader allows for no deviation from the rules that prescribe the group's functioning. The group follow the lead of the leader and are required to do what they are told.

1.6.2 TALKING SHOP

Many groups exist as communication channels and little else. They are there to pass information to members and collect information back. At a productive level, such groups may be highly efficient but they do not meet an individual's needs for growth or belonging. In such groups, the leader's role is purely administrative.

In a group that is purely a "talking shop", the leader...

- has no sense of the group's potential to grow as a group
- is only interested in what the group know now
- is more interested in discussing a topic, not experiencing it
- stifles opportunities to try things out
- avoids the risk and pain of change and confrontation
- is satisfied with a collection of ideas.

1.6.3 MANIPULATION

Manipulative group leadership is one stage on from a talking shop style of leadership. Here the group meets and is led through the motions of interaction in order to arrive at a pre-set conclusion.

We manipulate when...

- we know the outcome
- we know the outcome and keep it hidden
- we know the outcome but pretend we might go elsewhere
- we know the outcome and persuade people it's their best destination
- we know the outcome and force others to go there
- we know the outcome and believe that's where others should be
- we know the outcome and head there whether they come with us or not.

1.6.4 TRICKING THE GROUP

There is often a fine line to be drawn between manipulating a group to do what you want them to do and facilitating or helping them to go where they want to go. There are some leadership theories that encourage the duplicity: get people to go where you want whilst thinking they're going where they want. Manipulation is invariably devious, hidden, contrived and exploitative. We know we are manipulating when we have already planned how things will turn out in the group, possibly because our sponsors (eg higher management) demand it or we are frightened of what will happen if people do what they want. Manipulation is also a refuge for those who are frightened of giving up their control.

1.6.5 CONTROL

Control forms of group leadership are at the opposite end of the spectrum from facilitation. Control leadership involves: predetermined outcomes; hidden agendas; people controlled by fear either explicitly or implicitly; rigid structures; authority supreme; neat endings; process as a means to an end; power over people. Facilitation involves: unknown outcomes; open agendas; a safe environment; loose structures; freedom is valued; questions more important than answers; process as the key; power to the people.

1.7 DEFINING "FACILITATION"

So what exactly is "facilitation"? Here are 3 definitions.

- a. Jarlath Benson says that, “Facilitation is a helping process designed to correspond to specific instances of individual and group need, based on a view of man as in constant interaction and relationship with others.”
- b. Dale Hunter says that, “Facilitation is creating a space where people can be themselves.” And, finally,
- c. Trevor Bentley says that, “Facilitation is the provision of opportunities, resources, encouragement, and support for the group to succeed in achieving its objectives and to do this through enabling the group to take control and responsibility for the way they proceed”.

While facilitation has grown out of its use in group therapy, its value is now recognised at the highest levels of many organisations. In practice, many successful business leaders facilitate what goes on in their companies. Examples of where facilitation can be valuably practised include: team meetings; training sessions; brainstorming and problem-solving meetings; mediation and conciliation of grievances, conflicts and disputes; leading teams; motivating groups.

Whether you do it consciously or intuitively, facilitation is one of the most important skills you can possess. Without it, you will only get a fraction of what is possible from a group of people. With it, all things are possible.

1.8 KEY POINTS

1. Facilitation creates the conditions in which people can make their own choices about how to work and how to grow.
2. Facilitation is one of a family of new ways of managing others that don't rely on force or manipulation.
3. A person who helps others to grow must first value each person whoever they are and whatever they do.
4. It is a principle of facilitation that only individuals themselves can take the route to personal growth; the group leader is there to make it easier for them.
5. All groups have tension between the pull towards what the group can offer and the pull towards remaining an individual.
6. A group's behaviour is a constant interplay of individual needs.

2 GROUP LEARNING



When your group is a talking-shop group, such as a committee of different people, it may learn as individuals but it doesn't always learn as a group. That is the outcome of the way the group is led. Facilitative groups, on the other hand, are always learning groups. That is because they are on a journey of self-discovery.

Here are some of the key aspects of group learning.

2.1 THE LEARNING REVOLUTION

If you go back 50 years, the predominant model of learning was leader-led learning. In this model, the person in charge of the learning had all the answers and those learning received their learning from them. Today things are very different. Learning can come from anywhere. In groups that are working on change and learning, the learning can come from the leader, guest speakers, from others in the group, from activities that the leader sets up, from active discovery, from reflection. The facilitative group leader uses their knowledge of all these learning methods to select the best for his or her group.

2.2 THE 3 LEVELS OF LEARNING

There are 3 levels of group learning. Imagine a group when it first forms. People don't know one another well and may feel anxious about how they will do. They may also be worried about what they are going to learn and whether they will understand it. And finally they may be concerned about whether they will get on with others in the group. Now imagine

a group that has overcome each of these anxieties. First, the individual members will feel relaxed and confident. Second, they will find the subject matter stimulating and interesting. And third, they will love being in the group, its interactions and challenges. Moving to these points is what facilitation can achieve.

2.3 PROMOTING LEARNING

To promote learning across the 3 levels of individual anxiety, subject matter understanding, and group interaction, a facilitator will need to work on the following areas:

a. reducing individual anxiety

Dealing with people's anxieties is a primary concern for facilitators as high anxiety will block the learning process. You can do this by creating a psychologically safe environment where people can be themselves.



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b. designing stimulating agendas

Agendas are at the forefront of groupwork as they are the issues that the group are working on or trying to solve. As a facilitator, you can create stimulating agendas by setting agendas that are relevant and important for the group, pitched at just the right level, and presented in a lively and involving way.

c. promoting group interaction

In every case of group learning, there are opportunities to develop skills that will help the group grow and develop. These skills include working with others whose views are different from our own; managing conflict in the group; listening, communicating and building rapport; resolving personality differences; and emotional intelligence skills such as empathy, sharing, and influencing.

2.3.1 HOW TO REDUCE ANXIETY

Dealing with the anxieties of group members is a primary concern for facilitators, since high levels of anxiety will block other processes.

- the facilitator models lack of fear and anxiety in her own behaviour, for example not minding judgment, criticism and assessment
- the facilitator offers a protective environment: no tricks, no stress, no surprises
- the facilitator makes self-disclosures as a way of telling the group that it is a safe environment
- the facilitator brings the issue of how anxious people are feeling to the surface, acknowledging that it is normal and natural
- the group face up to why threats may exist
- trust is promoted since trust and anxiety are like a see-saw: when one is high, the other is low.

2.3.2 FREE FROM ANXIETY

To be able to understand other people's anxiety and not join with it or express their own, facilitators need to have worked through their own personal anxiety issues. This means:

- trusting that every occasion of groupwork can be an anxiety-free experience for them and ourselves
- coming to terms with personal feelings of grief, fear and anger from the past

- recognizing personal masks and a willingness to show oneself without masks
- having beliefs about one's role in the world.

“The more you, the facilitator, have done personal development work - both in healing early childhood memories and in opening up to transpersonal energies and domains - the more flexible you'll be in your facilitation processes.” (John Heron)

2.3.3 BREAKING DOWN ANXIETY

The group facilitator's role is to create an environment in which learning and growth can take place. Breaking down anxiety is a key step in this process. The facilitator can do this in the following ways:

- plan the agenda so it is interesting and stimulating
- allow the group to have control over the process
- raise the group's awareness of anxiety issues that originate in the workplace, eg power hierarchies, gender issues, compulsiveness to work and not experience
- create a permissive learning and doing environment.

“Most people's lives are ruled by the fear of losing what they have now or what they might have in the future. We need to move from the fear of losing to the joy of doing. Only then will anxiety be transformed into positive energy.” (Jagdish Parikh)

2.4 SEASONS OF THE GROUP

When a facilitator encourages learning across all 3 levels, there is every chance that a group will grow and develop to its fullest. This growth can be seen as an organic growth cycle that is similar to other natural growth cycles such as the seasons of the year. Here are the features of each stage of a group's “seasons”:

2.4.1 GROUP WINTER

Group winter is the first phase of group growth and typical of groups meeting for the first time. In this phase, people are often quiet and defensive with high levels of anxiety. Typically, they look to the group leader more than to each other.

2.4.2 GROUP SPRING

In group spring, the atmosphere of the group begins to warm and new life breaks through in new ideas and possibilities. There is more interaction amongst the group though perhaps only with selected members. However, there are still moments when people retreat into their earlier anxieties.

2.4.3 GROUP SUMMER

In group summer, the sun is high and group growth now moves on at a fast and furious pace. Ideas and possibilities abound and flow freely. People are noisy, active and unrestrained. It is a time of high trust in the group. Just like real summers, it is a phase when growth needs to be checked, cut back, and guided in certain directions just as plants need to be cut and pruned to produce their best blooms and fruit.

2.4.4 GROUP AUTUMN

Autumn is the time of year when the year's crop comes to fruition and is harvested. In learning groups, it is the time when the group can deliver its own fruit and achieve its objectives. There is close, often unspoken, contact amongst the group who may see themselves as capable of achieving anything they are set. The group see themselves as a distinct unit with an identity all their own. There is a mix of joy at what has been accomplished and sadness at the thought of completion and close.

2.5 THE GROUP DYNAMIC

In his book "The Facilitator's Handbook", John Heron says that there are positive and negative forms of energy in groups.

The positive forms occur when the group is task-oriented, ie working on a set task; process-oriented, ie working on how it works; expressing itself, eg through work-related activities, problem-solving, mime, art, music; interactive, ie in close contact with one another; confronting, ie facing up to difficult issues; individual, ie letting individuals be by themselves; charismatic, ie in a state of higher group awareness.

Negative forms of group energy include educational alienation; restrictions carried over from the workplace; individual defensiveness; and taking the easy way out.

The ultimate success of facilitation is to lead a group from its initial phase of uncertainty and anxiety to its final phase of achievement and completion. To do this, a facilitator will need to apply just those nudges and interventions that help the group progress. Not every group will go the distance. But every group has the potential to get there.

2.6 KEY POINTS

1. Facilitation is a key approach to managing teams in organisations that seek to be learning organisations.
2. We can measure a group's development by its level of anxiety, emotional maturity and intellectual curiosity.
3. In facilitating groups, the process of learning is as important as the content and outcomes.
4. Facilitators can transform the energy in anxiety into something more valuable.
5. The most important aspect of groupwork for personal growth is how people interact with each other.
6. A group can develop organically from the coldness of winter to the abundance of autumn.

3 STARTING POINTS FOR GROUPWORK

The starting points for groupwork are the setting up of groups and the initial contact you make in the first session. It is in these moments that people find answers to the kind of group experience they are going to have and whether they are going to enjoy it.

Here are some of the features of these initial stages.

3.1 WHAT GROUPS?

Facilitation works best in groups which are relatively mature and motivated. This means that they are willing to take on responsibility for their own processes. Such groups could include teambuilding groups; project review teams; multi-group problem-solving teams; and mediation groups. The mix of people in the group is also important. Groups that are too alike may find insufficient challenge, while groups that are too dissimilar may find it harder to bond. A good mix is a group that is similar enough to be compatible and different enough to be stimulating.

3.2 GROUP SIZE

There are different challenges working in small groups and large groups. Small groups can be more satisfying because they give people more chance to join in. Large groups can be more interesting because they offer more ideas for problem-solving. Note also that people behave differently in different-size groups. People who are confident in small groups can withdraw in large groups. In small groups it is harder to get in touch with how you feel; in large groups with how you think.

3.3 OPEN AND CLOSED GROUPWORK

When setting up your room, be aware that people will immediately notice whether the tone is closed or open. Signs of closed groupwork are enclosed and overlooked settings; barriers between the group and facilitator; and a high level of formality in the greeting you give people. Signs of open groupwork are an open seating plan where people can sit where they want; no barriers; and a welcoming relaxed unhurried pace to your greeting.

3.4 INTRODUCTIONS

How you handle introductions can be the group's first clue of the kind of leadership you plan to provide. A facilitative conveys warmth, empathy and interest.

“Hi, I’m John Graham from Accounts. I’ve been in my job for 15 years.”

“Anything to add, John?”

“Well, I’m a bit nervous about this teambuilding stuff and I don’t know what to expect.”

“OK, John, thanks for being honest. It’s likely others are nervous too so perhaps you can tell us what it’s like from time to time as we progress.”

3.5 PERSONAL GOAL-SETTING

An activity on personal goal-setting early in the life of a new group sends a clear sign that the group members’ needs are uppermost in your mind. A simple goal-setting exercise is to pair people off to discuss “what I hope to get from this group” and then to get people to share their expectations with the rest of the group. If you do this exercise, then you should come back regularly and ask people whether they are making progress towards their goals and if not, what changes they would like to see.

3.6 CONTRACTING

If you want, you can have a “contracting” session in the first part of the group’s work. This can cover anything that affects the group’s working such as timekeeping, behaviour, and rules of conduct. You might want to include what you expect of the group, eg to be accepting of others, and what the group expect of you, eg to be supportive and helpful. You might also include the idea of “right relations” in which people agree to treat everyone else in the group in open, respectful, and responsible ways.

3.6.1 RIGHT RELATIONS

The concept of “right relations” can be introduced at the start of groupwork in the knowledge that it influences every aspect of group functioning. As facilitator, you may need to coach the group in right relations if the group fails to make headway. Right relations is the willingness of all members to relate to everyone else in the group in open, respectful and responsible ways. This means creating an atmosphere in which members of the group have equal status and feel free to take risks within the group without fear of punishment. Some interpersonal

features that create right relations are: genuine listening; patience; sharing; understanding; trust; asking for and giving help; empathy; co-operative ways of working; and teamwork.

3.7 WORK AND PLAY

Throughout creative groupwork, there is a constant interplay between work and play. The “work” aspects are the tasks set. The “play” aspects are the informal interactions between people which can include jokes, asides, comments, laughter, gossip, and teasing. These are the person-affirming aspects of the group’s life and can be encouraged by the tone you set from the start.

3.7.1 NUDGING INTO OWNERSHIP

There is an opportunity even in the first group task of a new group to indicate your facilitative style of group leadership:

“I’d like you to do this exercise in two groups, so let’s split you down the middle...”

or

“This exercise is best done in two groups. How would you like to divide yourselves?”

Testing the water in this way will tell you whether the group are keen to take on the responsibility of ownership or not. If they are, fine; if not, you will need to continue your own directive style until another opportunity presents itself.

There are many factors that go into the success of groupwork. Some are unpredictable; others are manageable. By setting the tone you want from the start, and modelling to people the kind of behaviour you expect of them, you give yourself every chance of success.

3.8 KEY POINTS

1. Facilitation can be used in teambuilding, training, mediation and counselling.
2. A group that has some similarities and some differences amongst its members is more likely to develop than one that is very similar or very different.
3. Seven is the ideal number for groupwork because it has the advantages of large and small groupworking.

4. In small groups it is harder to get in touch with how you feel; in large groups with what you think.
5. Right from the start of groupwork you should show the group that you take your lead from them.
6. Right relations is the willingness of the group to relate to others in the group in open and respectful ways.

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4 ISSUES OF CONTROL

Everything that happens in groupwork, no matter what kind of group, is about power and control. When the power is totally with the group leader, there is minimal chance for the group to fulfil its potential. When power moves towards the group, all things become possible.

4.1 WHERE POWER LIES

There are always 3 possible locations of power in a group.

- a. with the leader
- b. with the group
- c. with the leader and group together.

If a group asks a question, you can reply, “The answer is...”. Or you can reply, “Tell me what you think first and then I’ll tell you what I think”. Or you can reply, “Why do you want to know?” The third is the pure facilitative response as it offers the greatest potential for discovery and growth.

4.2 AIMS

In the organisational context, most groups are set up by the organisation to achieve organisational aims. This means that the group are unlikely to start off their work having control over their aims. However, if the group is set up for long-term working, there is no reason why, with the help of the facilitator, they cannot slowly take responsibility for their own aims and direction.

4.3 PLANNING

There are 3 types of approaches to planning what a group will do.

- a. Apollonian Planning
Apollonian planning is the name some commentators give to detailed plans, after Apollo, the Greek god of order and structure. In Apollonian planning, you will plan every minute of the group’s time. This is a hierarchical approach as it gives the group no chance to explore their own issues or things they learn as the group develops.

b. Safety Net Planning

Safety Net Planning, as the name suggests, offers a little bit more leeway than a tight plan that the group must stick to. It means that the group can change plans but, if they get stuck, can fall back on a pre-prepared plan.

c. Dionysian Planning

Dionysian planning is the name some people give to pure facilitative planning after Dionysius, the god of freedom and spontaneity. An example of Dionysian planning would be: “9.30am Start” and nothing more. It means the group leads themselves.

4.4 DETAILS OF GROUPWORK

It is rare for a group to make decisions about every single thing in groupwork. For example, it is likely that the facilitator will decide on issues such as start and finish times and who is to attend. The group alone might decide how it wants to work and what roles its members take. And the group and facilitator together might decide details such as dress codes and timings of sessions. It is a good idea to agree these responsibilities at the start of the group’s work.

4.5 ACTIVITIES

Depending on what activities the group are looking at, control will either be predominantly with the facilitator or with the group. When the group is learning new material, such as in an induction session, the facilitator will probably have most control. When the group is brainstorming ideas amongst itself, the facilitator will take a back seat and defer to the group.

4.6 REVIEW

Review is usually the last activity of groupwork. When the review is dominated by what the facilitator thinks, there is only one result being voiced. When the review is shared by everyone in the group, expressing openly how they feel about the groupwork, there are many views and the group lives on.

4.7 CONTROL LOCATIONS

Writer John Heron says that there are always 15 possible control locations in a group. These are the 3 control centres, - facilitator, group, or both, - in each of the 5 groupwork processes: aims; planning; details; activities; and review. The more the group move freely into these 15 locations, the more successful your groupwork will be.

Every decision taken in a group reflects who has power. When the facilitator takes all the decisions, the leader knows best. When the group and leader take decisions together, the leader listens. When the group takes their own decisions, the leader leads.

4.8 KEY POINTS

1. In every group situation there are three centres where you can place power: with you, with the group, with you both.
2. Even if others set the aims for the group, the group can still decide how they are to get there.
3. A facilitator might prepare for what the group might want to do but leave the decisions to them.
4. The work of a developing group will consist of activities to lower anxiety, activities to build relationships and activities about the issues.
5. Control can move back and forth between the facilitator and the group.
6. As a group takes more and more ownership for what happens in the group, they become more and more confident as a group.

5 EMPOWERING PEOPLE

In traditional experiences of groupwork, such as the home unit, the school classroom, and the workplace team, we have become used to hierarchical models of power where we defer to those in charge. This often leads to feelings of alienation, frustration, and powerlessness. The process of facilitation has a simple aim: to put power back where it belongs - with those in the group.

Here are some of the ways to empower your groups.

5.1 OPENNESS



We all have experiences of having to do what we are told. In groupwork, this could mean having no choice in taking part, having to follow someone else's agenda, and having to express ourselves to please others. In this route there is no growth. Instead of compulsion, facilitators practise openness. You can do this by giving people their own time and space, allowing them the freedom to work things out for themselves, and the patience to let what happens happen.

5.2 VALUING

In hierarchical models of groupwork, value often seems attached to where you are in the organisational chain of command. In facilitative models, value is about respecting everyone for who they are, regardless of where they appear on the organisational chart. There are many ways to show value such as by being courteous and respectful, quiet and attentive, and appreciating every contribution that people make.

5.3 OPEN LANGUAGE

Everything you say and do as a facilitator can underline your own openness and your invitation to others to be open too. Cultivate a relaxed, still, and unhurried presence with neutral gestures that give nothing away. Face people when they speak to you, uncross your arms and legs so you appear non-defensive and let people in to the real you. Use language that is clear, simple, assertive, and relevant. Speak only when you have something worth saying.

5.4 OWNING

It is the facilitator's task to guide the group into taking ownership of their needs and wants. This process can be reflected in small but significantly empowering ways when we help individuals change the way they speak.

- speaking for others. When someone claims to speak for others, eg “I think we all want a break”, ask him or her to check it out with the others first.
- blaming. When someone blames another person for how they feel, eg “He makes me angry”, ask him to own his feelings, ie “I feel angry when he says that”.
- speaking directly. When someone speaks indirectly, eg “Does anyone want a drink?”, suggest they speak directly, ie “I would like a drink”.
- making choices. When someone says they must do something, eg “I have to go”, ask her to check that it isn't their choice rather than a requirement, ie “I want to go”.

5.4.1 NEVER SAY YOU HAVE TO

In his book “The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People”, Stephen Covey recounts the story of the student who avoided owning his choices.

One time a student asked me: “Would you excuse me from class? I have to go on a tennis trip.”

“You have to go?” I asked. “I really have to,” he exclaimed. “What will happen if you don't?” “Why, they'll kick me off the team.”

“How would you like that?” I asked. “I wouldn't.”

“In other words, you choose to go because you want the consequences of staying on the team. But if you don't come to class, what would be the natural consequence?” “I guess I'll miss the learning.”

“That’s right. So you have to weigh that consequence against the other consequence and make a choice. I know if it were me, I’d choose to go on the tennis trip. But never say you have to do anything.”

“I choose to go on the tennis trip,” he meekly replied.

5.5 NON-RESCUING

In traditional forms of groupwork, leaders are often placed in the role of expert with all the answers. While this makes them look good, it doesn’t take the group anywhere and allows people an easy life. In facilitative groupwork, leaders don’t offer people easy ways out of difficulties.

Jill: “I couldn’t possibly do that. I’ve never role-played before.”

You: “OK, so who would you like to help you?”

5.5.1 RELEASING THEIR POWER

Not intervening to rescue people is most important when the group hits a problem and turns to you, the facilitator, to help them out. You can turn the problem back to them by using these three steps:

1. Point out what the problem is
2. Show what the consequences could be to everyone
3. Invite them to do something about it.

Tom: “I think it means doing nothing...”

Julie: “I don’t agree...”

You: “OK so we have a fundamental difference of opinion. This could lead to serious problems, of course. How can we go about producing a definition that we can all put our names to?”

5.6 BOOMERANG QUESTIONS

The “boomerang”, or “elastic”, question is a way of showing people that you do not have all the answers, and, even if you do, it doesn’t matter and the group’s answers are far more

relevant and worth discovering. All you do is send back the question to the questioner, as in this response:

Susan: “What exactly is facilitation, Malcolm?”

You: “Well, what do you think it is, Susan?”

5.6.1 ANSWER A QUESTION WITH A QUESTION

Boomerang questions work best when they make people think. Here are 7 responses that make people do just that.

1. “I would never want to do that.” “What would you want to do?”
2. “I wouldn’t like to do this.” “What would make it more attractive?”
3. “This will never work.” “What would work better?”
4. “There are too many problems for it to work.” “What are the main problems?”
5. “There are lots of changes needed.” “Such as...”
6. “It’s a good plan but I have some niggling doubts.” “What would put your mind at rest?”
7. “It’s unlikely to work in its present form.” “What changes would you suggest?”

5.7 OFFERING OPTIONS

One of the most useful alternatives to rescuing people is to offer them options. This is how. First, tune in to the problem that the group are grappling with. When they ask for your help, ask group-focused questions such as, “What can you do here?” and “What’s missing?” and “What will happen if you do that?”. Then, listen to their answers and, instead of giving them your solution, sum up the options and let them choose.

5.8 LETTING IT HAPPEN

Timothy Gallwey tells the story of a Zen master who once asked an audience of Westerners what they thought was the most important word in the English language. They suggested words like “love”, “truth”, “success”, “belief”, “honesty”, to all of which he shook his head. Eventually he put them out of their misery. “It’s the word, “let”. Let it be. Let it happen.”

5.8.1 LETTING GO

To let go doesn't mean to stop caring;
It means I can't do it for someone else.
To let go is not to cut myself off,
It's the realization that I can't control another.

To let go is not to enable,
But to allow learning from natural consequences.
To let go is to admit powerlessness,
Which means the outcome is not in my hands.

To let go is not to try and change or blame another;
I can only change myself.
To let go is not to care for, but to care about;
To let go is not to fix but be supportive.

To let go is not to judge;
But allow another to be a human being.
To let go is not to be in the middle arranging all the outcomes;
But to allow others to affect their own outcomes.
To let go is not to be protective;
It is to permit another to face reality.
To let go is not to deny, but to accept;
To let go is not to nag, scold or argue,
But to search out my own shortcomings and correct them.
To let go is not to adjust everything to my own desires;
But to take each day as it comes and cherish the moment.”
(Anon)

The difference between traditional groupwork and facilitative groupwork is about a shift in power from leader to group. You change the location of power in what you say, what you do, and who you are. And in the process, you become infinitely more powerful.

5.9 KEY POINTS

1. The facilitator models aspects of openness to the group.
2. Facilitation is an act of trust and invites trust in return.
3. Being open with others means giving them the freedom to make their own choices.
4. When people see that their views are taken seriously, they begin to take them seriously too.
5. In a facilitative group, everyone is valued in their own right.
6. Don't do it for them.

6 THE FACILITATOR'S ROLE

Facilitation is one of the hardest leadership skills to pin down. Unlike other skills of which it is part, such as listening and questioning, facilitation is a mix of many skills and many roles. Here are the main roles.

6.1 EVENT ORGANISER

If you are leading a group activity, you will probably be responsible for many, if not all, of the details of running the group event. This means organising venues, locations, and timetables; obtaining the physical resources needed in the event, such as laptops, projectors, and video recorders; preparing agendas; managing speakers; and, very importantly, letting people know the arrangements. Whether you do this yourself or with a team, don't ignore this role. It will go a long way to establishing your credibility as an organiser and facilitator.

6.2 EXPERT

While you can facilitate without being an expert in the group's agenda, you will be much more effective if you have a good understanding of the topic and the issues. When you do, you are in a much better position to steer the group forward. You can also take a more objective view of things particularly if the group are stuck on details. You will also be able to interpret jargon and be the link between guest speakers and the group.

6.3 READING THE GROUP

Until your group arrives and starts working together, you will not know for sure just what they want from you. Groups that are newly formed and unsure of each other will most likely want clear direction from you. Groups that know one another and have an existing level of trust will probably expect more freedom to work things out without direction. Sometimes, there will be a mix of people in the group, some wanting direction and others wanting delegation. Reading the group and knowing where to pitch your interventions and suggestions is one of the most important and difficult roles you'll play.

6.4 MOUNTAIN GUIDE

Facilitators often have to lead from 3 different positions in relation to the group. Sometimes they will lead by example from the front, sometimes as part of the group, and sometimes from the rear in a support role. They are like mountain guides who know just when to tell the group, “Follow me!”, when to be one of the team; and when to let everyone climb a cliff first so that they can check their progress from below.

6.5 OBSERVER

Facilitators need to be close watchers of what is going on in the group at all times, particularly when the group hits a major block. If you are observant, you will sense the problem from how the group starts to behave. There could be stony silences; side conversations; signs of boredom, tiredness, and fidgeting; and things starting to drag. When this happens, stop the group and let people know what you see, eg “Can we review where we are?”. Put the problem to the group and ask them what they want to do about it.

6.6 NUDGER

From the very start of the group's work, the wise facilitator looks for opportunities to nudge the group into ownership of its processes. You could for example in the first exercise give people an option between letting you decide how it is to be carried out or letting them decide themselves. Even if they pass on this occasion, use the next occasion to nudge them a little further into accepting responsibility for the task.

6.7 CATALYST

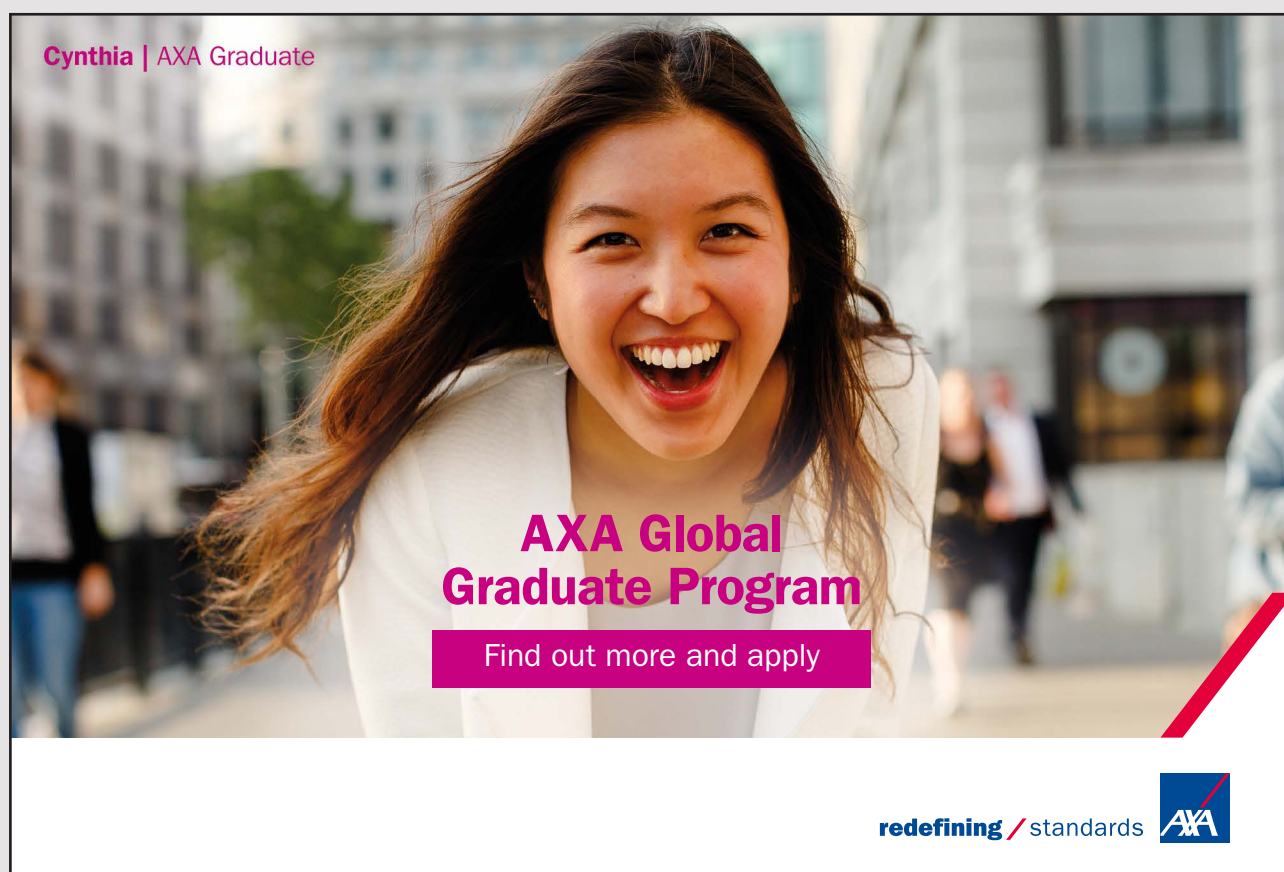
A catalyst is a substance that merely by its presence causes change in other substances. The facilitator acts like a catalyst when he or she works with others at all levels.

- a. at the feeling level, she is wooer, charmer, and empathizer
- b. at the thinking level, he is interpreter, questioner, and stimulator
- c. at the valuing level, she is champion, enabler, and nurturer.

It isn't by chance that the role of facilitator is hard to define. By its very nature, facilitation is a subtle, under-played, and understated skill. Whatever role you play, don't perform it as if to say, “Look at me!” but perform it with a light and gentle touch.

6.8 KEY POINTS


1. Facilitators play a range of roles in a group, all subtle and unimposing.
2. Group processes take place in the physical realm, the intellectual, emotional, and even spiritual.
3. At a practical level, facilitators are responsible for the success of a group event.
4. The facilitative leader can lead from in front, in among, or from the rear.
5. One of the key roles of the facilitator is to observe what is happening in the group and report, nudge, or gently intervene.
6. The facilitator is like a catalyst who sets off chemical reactions in others.



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7 GROUP ENERGY

It is the intangible but very real energy of a group that tells you what is happening in the group. In particular, it tells you whether the group is moving in positive directions or negative directions. When it is moving positively, you, as facilitator, will observe for most of the time but not intervene. When it is moving negatively, you will need to be more present to help the group find a way forward.

Here are some of the features of how you can sense and work with group energy.

7.1 ENERGY FLOW

Group energy can be sensed by whether, as a whole, the group is working on 3 areas of group life:

- a. the task at hand, as seen in the activities that the group are working on
- b. the life of the group itself, as seen in the interactions between individuals
- c. the development of the group as a unit.

Symbolically, the group's energy flow can resemble a trickling brook, a stagnant pool, a gushing waterfall, a shallow stream, a mature river, or a sedate estuary.

7.1.1 PHYSICAL ENERGY

The physical energy of a group is the easiest kind of energy to detect. It is what you see the group doing in front of you. For example, are the group sluggish or animated? Are they working close together or at a distance? Are they working as one or in small sub-groups? Is the body language open and receptive or closed and defensive? Does the group look full of energy or not?

7.1.2 EMOTIONAL ENERGY

The emotional energy of a group can be detected from the vibes that the group give off. For example, does it feel like the group are enjoying being together or not? Are there high

levels of trust? Or do people hold back out of fear? Is the atmosphere friendly or hostile? Are the group relating on many levels beyond just the requirement to work together?

7.1.3 INTELLECTUAL ENERGY

The intellectual energy of a group can be read by detecting the group's ability to deal with the intellectual content of the group's agenda. For example, is the group bursting with ideas or stumped for something to say? Does everyone have a contribution to make or just one or two? Do the group stick with conventional ideas or do they take risks? Do people explain their ideas so that others in the group understand them?

7.1.4 SPIRITUAL ENERGY

A group's spiritual energy, its team spirit, is the extent to which the group has taken on a reality over and above the sum of the individuals in it. When this happens, everyone in the group is present in the moment without pretence. Their humanness emerges. There is a sense of belonging, of merging into oneness, of being part of something bigger than themselves. Conversely, the group's spiritual energy is low or non-existent when they see themselves as individuals first and a group second. Then they are unlikely to risk themselves for the group and will not be particularly bothered whether it continues or dies.

7.2 GROUP DYNAMICS

Group dynamics activities are short exercises that inject energy into the group or change its pace. Most dynamics exercises are either enliveners or relaxers. Enliveners increase the level of interaction, contact and energy; relaxers slow things down. Enliveners work when the group has become too sluggish and can include simple warm-up exercises such as stretching, arm and leg shaking, walking around the room and party games. They usually involve group members getting out of their seats. Relaxers work when the group has become too boisterous and can include any calming exercise such as deep breathing, meditation, sitting quietly, a period of silence and time alone.

7.3 DOMINANT MEMBERS

One of the trickiest problems a facilitator faces is dealing with dominant group members: people who hog the spotlight and speak at length. When a group has two such people, the

rest of the group may sit idly by as if they were at a tennis match. The group will silently look to the facilitator to intervene to resolve this problem. If it is not resolved, there may be underground rumblings and even group defections. There is no easy way to resolve such a situation. Limiting the amount of discussion in favour of active work is one option. Politely pointing out that you want a spread of views is another. The truly facilitative approach is to put the issue to the group suggesting that one or two people seem to be dominating while the rest of the group seem happy to let them.

7.4 RETICENT MEMBERS

The facilitator has a double concern in groupwork, both for the welfare of the group as a whole and for the individuals in it. When someone is reluctant to participate, the facilitator may need at some point to intervene. Reticence may be due to baggage carried over from the workplace, or because a person is naturally quiet, or because they are uncomfortable in the group setting. The group leader needs to be sensitive to who the reticent group members are and look for ways to lessen their anxieties and bring them in. Noticing cues is one way: “Jim, you looked as if you wanted to say something”; another way is to ask them to do something for you. If a quiet member’s remarks are offered and cause embarrassment, the facilitator can reassure them and perhaps weave their comments into the group.

7.5 DEALING WITH PROBLEMS

One of the valuable benefits of facilitation is that, unlike control and manipulative leadership styles, it offers a group a way to deal with their own problems of conflict. The following model is an example of how a facilitator can intervene and re-direct a problem back to the group:

1. raise awareness of the issue in a low-key way: “I’d like to tell you about something I’ve noticed”
2. point out what the implications are if it is not dealt with: “...because it affects the way we work as a group”
3. present it as an opportunity to try out new behaviours: “Perhaps there is something we need to change”
4. invite the group to explore it collectively: “Could we take a look at it?”

In this way, problems can become a challenge for the group and so become another opportunity for learning.

7.6 RAIN-CHECKS

A useful companion to group dynamics exercises are rain-checks. These are ways to take the temperature of the group. A rain-check at any time you feel the group needs to tell you where it is, is also a chance to ask them where they want to go next.

Rain-check exercises include:

- asking the group as a whole “How are things going?”
- paired discussions in which people discuss how they feel
- asking the group to plot how they’re doing on a graph from “confused” to “clear”
- plotting their progress by asking them to stand in the room between two points marked “satisfied” or “not satisfied”.

Of course, you need to listen to what the group says even if it is something you hadn’t expected, such as criticism.

7.7 GROUP AIKIDO

One of the purposes of facilitation is to help a group work its way from negative energy to positive energy. One way a facilitator can do this is to use “group aikido”, which is based on the idea of the Japanese martial art, aikido, to re-direct group energy. Like the aikido expert, the facilitator doesn’t meet negative energy head-on, but re-directs it by bending it, absorbing it, and going with it until it can move in a positive direction.

The energy of a group is what gives the group its unique identity. Energy creates motivation, direction, and intention. It is what determines how people feel about being in the group. Reading it, moving it, and subtly influencing it are all responsibilities of the group leader.

7.8 KEY POINTS

1. One of the key roles of the facilitator is to identify the interventions he or she can make in the group energy to help the group progress.
2. Group energy can be perceived in different ways.
3. The group energy can be physical, mental, intellectual, or spiritual or a combination of these.

4. A facilitator may directly intervene with a change in energy if it helps the group progress.
5. If there are dominant members of the group, the facilitator can raise the issue with the group.
6. Group rain-checks invite the group to say how well they think the group is working.

8 DEALING WITH THE BLOCKS



No matter what tasks your group are working on – whether trying to achieve new goals or giving birth to a new way of working, – the fact that they are “struggling” to succeed can bring with it a number of painful feelings. When a group becomes despondent at facing these painful feelings, you must put on your facilitator’s hat and, true to the essence of facilitation, ease their way forward. Here are 7 possible blocks that will face you and the group.

8.1 PROBLEMS

Many groups come together in the first place because of problems that they need to work on. Sometimes the problems are outside the group; sometimes they are inside it. Facing up to problems gives the group a creative tension. Without it, group life would lack challenge. It would be too easy and comfortable. It would have no reason to go on.

To quote Benjamin Hoff, “Without problems, there can be no personal growth, no group achievement and no progress for humanity. Without difficulties, life would be like a stream without rocks or curves, without torrents or dams, without stillpools and eddies.”

8.2 FRUSTRATION

Whenever we strive for something new in life, we inevitably come up against difficulties, difficulties which often stop us in our tracks. The feeling of not being able to reach the goals we want is frustration and it is inevitable when a group comes together to solve problems. Often group members will appeal to the facilitator to resolve their frustration for them. But

facilitative leaders know that there are no lessons to be learnt by skirting round frustration, only by guiding a group through it.

8.3 PAIN

Not being able to find a way to one's goals can sometimes feel painful, even physically painful. We all want the pleasure of success, not the pain of failure. But there is nothing worthwhile in easy success. The sages of Ancient China suggested two paths out of pain. You could take the Taoist path and accept life's pain as an integral part of life itself. Or you could choose the Confucianist path and use the pain as a test of your resilience. As Confucius said, "It is when the ice and snow are on them that we see the strength of the cypress and the pine. I am grateful for the trouble around me, because it gives me the opportunity to realize how fortunate I am."

8.4 FAILURE

For a group who are trying to succeed, failure is the state they are in until they reach their goals. Our society doesn't like failures. Everywhere we promote images of success. But even for the truly successful, failure is the state they are in for 99% of their journey. One of the things you can do as facilitator, when a group complains that they have failed, is to divorce the failure from the feeling of failure. Instead replace it with the feeling of success: the knowledge that every failure brings the group one step nearer their goals.

8.5 CONFUSION

We don't like confusion. It evokes thoughts of uncertainty, danger, and panic, like driving at night through thick fog. But a learning group will inevitably experience confusion in the early stage of their work especially if they are in brand new territory. Helping people stay with their confusion without giving up is one of the most valuable things a facilitator can do. As Trevor Bentley says, "Being able to stay in a state of confusion until clarity arrives is the height of intellectual ability. It's what we call wisdom."

8.6 RISK

All moves towards group growth involve varying degrees of risk. The group is, after all, moving out of the comfort zones of what they already know and do well into areas that they are unsure of. That means giving up things they hold dear such as personal status in the pecking order, trappings of power, and the feelings of established group relationships. Facilitators can help the group face risk by helping them move forward in easy steps and managing the group's change.

8.7 CONFLICT

Conflict is always at or near the surface when groups work to solve problems. These may be conflicts between group members, conflicts on how to proceed, or conflicts on solutions themselves. As facilitator, you play a crucial role in steering the group away from destructive conflict and towards their own ways of working harmoniously together. That way you set them up for a solution they can all subscribe to as well as teaching them something about how to handle conflict.

Despite what some management theorists tell us, groups rarely proceed in a straight line from formation through normalization to accomplishment. The truth is that group growth is often a painful experience. But while it may not be comfortable, it is in working through the pain of not getting it right that all groups eventually fulfill their creative potential.

8.8 KEY POINTS

1. There can be no learning unless there is a goal to aim for and difficulties in getting there .
2. Managing frustration is a necessary step in the learning process.
3. Leaving people to find their own way out of confusion can be a valuable learning experience.
4. When individuals struggle in the group, the facilitator has the option of inviting the group to become aware of them.
5. When the group are in difficulty, one option the facilitator has is to explain what is happening.
6. The facilitator's presence and the support of the group allow people to take risks in groupwork.

9 THE ART OF NON-DOING

Managing people without doing anything is a strange concept for some people who believe that, to get a group of people to work, you have to direct them, control them, and push them. But when you are pushing them in the wrong direction, and against the flow, it is like pushing a river upstream: it's hard work and will probably not succeed. The alternative is to let things happen by taking your foot off the pedal and going with the flow, working with the group's energy not against it. This is non-doing and here are some of the ways that you can practise it.

9.1 ATTENTIVENESS

When you practise non-doing in any leadership role, it doesn't mean that you are doing nothing. It means you are still, quiet and attentive to what is going on. In the attentive state, you are aware of what is happening in the group without needing to judge it or put a name to it. As an observer, you can decide whether a struggling group need you to intervene or whether with a little help they can make it on their own.

Waiting signifies a quiet calm confidence that something valuable will emerge. Waiting allows you to observe what is going on in the group. Waiting allows you to tune in to where the group is and follow their lead. When you wait for others, they eventually take the lead.

“It took the class four sessions to realise that, if they wanted something to happen to them, it was they who had to provide the content. After the fourth session, the group became close to one another and their true selves appeared. There were moments of insight that were awesome in nature. We all felt elevated, freer, more accepting of ourselves and others.”
(Dr Samuel Tannenbaum on Carl Rogers' method of facilitation)

9.2 EMPOWERMENT

The problem with the old approach of directing, deciding, and doing is that, when a leader makes all these interventions, (a) they take away the power of the group; and (b) they make the group dependent on them. The group become like children, not adults. Simply by stepping back from these traditional roles, the facilitative leader signals that it is for the group to perform them instead.

Amongst the options open to the facilitator in promoting groupwork is his or her choice to leave the group alone. The facilitator can do this by simply agreeing on what the group are to do, announce where he or she is going and then leaving them to get on with their task. Not being present has a number of benefits. It removes any feeling that the facilitator is watching the group and judging them. It allows the group the freedom to be themselves. It shows the facilitator's trust in them. It focuses all the group's attention on each other.

9.3 SUBTLE SUPPORT

Subtle support is one of the key skills of facilitation. Subtle support allows you to give support to people in your group without making them dependent on you. Here are two simple ways to give subtle support:

- a. being present. Simply being present is often enough to let people know you're backing them. You don't have to do anything except be there.
- b. non-verbal cues. You can give your team support through a whole host of underplayed body language signals. A smile, a wink, a gentle touch on the arm, a querying look of the eyes, a gentle nod: all these can encourage without dictating.

9.4 GENTLENESS

Gentleness may sound soft, but it is one of the most powerful ways you can act. If, for example, the group have a problem and are spoiling for a fight, gentleness takes the sting out of the argument and overcomes any resistance. Here are 5 gentle persuasion techniques:

- a. suggesting options for the group to consider
- b. posing questions to make the group think
- c. pointing out the consequences of decisions
- d. defencelessness: not arguing for any point of view
- e. making your point indirectly through stories and anecdotes.

9.5 NON-DOING

Managing people without doing things ourselves is a foreign concept to most people in the Western world. Here our tradition is one of managing by harnessing, directing, controlling, dominating, exploiting and using.

Non-doing is an Eastern concept best expressed in the philosophy of Taoism. This is the tradition of letting things happen naturally without forcing them. It is based on the belief that people are naturally creative, spontaneous and aware and that we “manage” them best when we encourage these gifts to grow in each person rather than impose our wills on others.

This management philosophy of making things happen by non-doing is exquisitely expressed in the Taoist principle of Wu Wei which means “effortless effort”.

9.6 CHARISMA

One of the most powerful qualities of non-doing leadership is charisma. Charisma is hard to define. The word comes from the “Charities”, or Graces, of Greek mythology, who were reputed to have given mankind the gifts of humour, graciousness, and good manners. All great leaders have the gift of charisma. One of the most charismatic leaders to have lived was President John Kennedy. It was said that, when you spoke to Kennedy, you were made to feel that nothing else mattered to him at that moment but your thoughts, your ideas, and your feelings. Such is the power of charisma.

9.7 CLASS

There is a paradox about the leaders of old who relied on their traditional power to get things done. The paradox is that the more they relied on their power, the more they appeared weak without it. Modern leaders, by contrast, don't need to display their power. Their strength doesn't come from status, connections, or their ability to reward or punish; it comes from within. When power comes from within, you don't need to show it. That means you don't need to come on too strong with anyone, whether you're selling, reasoning, or trying to influence. By being gentle and confident, you display all the power you need. That way you gain the respect of others. There's a word for this. It's known as “class”.

In today's business world, there is little call for the leader who charges out in front as if they were on a white hot steed. Instead, today's leader is a non-doing catalyst. His or her role is to ignite the team into action, not by a stick of dynamite but by building a fire in

their hearts. Such leaders don't have to perform tricks to earn their spurs. They don't have to play to the gallery and shout "look at me!". But, in gentleness and non-doing, they can be infinitely more effective than their counterparts of the past.

9.8 KEY POINTS

1. It is the absence of doing anything that is at the heart of the facilitator's skill.
2. When you stand back and wait for others, they eventually take the lead.
3. Reading a group's energy is intuitive.
4. Being attentive to the group means that you can see the group as a group.
5. In facilitated groups, silence is an aid to understanding.
6. When you show your support to anyone in the group, do so in subtle and imperceptible ways.



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About e-Learning for Kids Established in 2004, e-Learning for Kids is a global nonprofit foundation dedicated to fun and free learning on the Internet for children ages 5 - 12 with courses in math, science, language arts, computers, health and environmental skills. Since 2005, more than 15 million children in over 190 countries have benefitted from eLessons provided by EFK! An all-volunteer staff consists of education and e-learning experts and business professionals from around the world committed to making difference. eLearning for Kids is actively seeking funding, volunteers, sponsors and courseware developers; get involved! For more information, please visit www.e-learningforkids.org.

10 ENDINGS AND SEPARATION

The last stage of facilitative groupwork can bring with it a mixture of emotions: success at achieving agreed goals; sadness at the break-up of a gelled group. It is also the chance to end on a high note.

Here are some of the features of the Ending stage of groupwork.

10.1 SIGNALLING ENDINGS

Just as certain rituals signal the start of groupwork, so certain rituals signal the endings of groupwork. These signals include a slowdown in physical activity; a quieter more reflective pace; and a look towards the future. The ending of groupwork can be an emotional time for some groups similar to the parting of close friends.

10.2 THE RITUALS OF GROUP ENDINGS

Depending on the type of group and purpose, there will be different kinds of activity in the last phase of groupwork. These can include a review of what the group has done; a review of how people feel about being in the group; a review of what people have learnt; plans for the future; some kind of celebration; and ritual farewells. If you have used a hands-off facilitative style throughout your group leadership, you can end by handing over much of the last stage to the group themselves.

10.3 REFLECTIONS ON YOUR STYLE

Some people will find the pure facilitative approach to groupwork unsettling and disorientating. They may prefer the hierarchical style where they know where they stand. For others, the facilitative approach may be eye-opening, an option they never thought possible. In experiencing responsibility for their own process, they may come to see all that is possible in other groups in their lives. For them, facilitation may have changed them in some way for ever.

Our ability to let go of our own needs in groupwork is the key to success as a facilitator. These needs can interfere in the process of helping others, acting like temptations. There are six main temptations:

1. a desire to cling to past formats of groupwork
2. a belief that to succeed in groupwork, you need to be perfect every time
3. a desire to create nice feelings in the group
4. wanting to be popular with everyone in the group
5. getting stuck at an intellectual level so that groupwork becomes a series of discussions
6. not being able to give up control to the group.

As Jarlath Benson has warned...

“Avoid crucifixions. You are not a messiah, nor are group members your disciples. So do not try to save, protect, rescue or work it out for everyone all of the time. Remember, we shoot our presidents, crucify our prophets and quickly forget our pop stars.”

10.4 CELEBRATION

When you have been with a group that has overcome some of the difficulties of group bonding and developed an identity of their own, then the last phase of groupwork merits some kind of celebration. It gives the group a ritual ending and a sense of completion. A celebration can be tinged with both joy and sadness: joy for the experience and sadness at the ending. In true facilitative mode, you can let the group decide how they want to express their celebration.

10.4.1 LIGHTEN UP

Adding perspective and a touch of light-heartedness to each experience of groupwork can guard against the enemies of facilitation: being too serious, forcing things and trying too hard.

Lightening up does a number of things. It reminds you that the role of helper is basically one of common sense and wisdom, not intellectual knowledge. It helps you not to take yourself too seriously. It reflects the gentle approach that is the hallmark of facilitation. It helps put bad experiences down to experience. It allows us to accept the value of all types of human behaviour, including clowning around and having fun.

“The first thing most people say when they get to Heaven is “Why was I so serious?””
(Old Red Indian saying)

10.4.2 BE OPEN TO SURPRISES

The “I’ve-seen-it-all, done-it-all” attitude of some experienced facilitators not only leads to staleness in groupwork; it also makes you miss the delight of being surprised in life. Don’t take anything about groupwork for granted. Keep a childlike wonder for the possibilities around you. Have respect for each session of groupwork as a unique event in itself. Don’t become stale by sticking to routines. Be willing to learn, to take risks and to abandon all your plans if the moment requires it.

“It is exceedingly important that a man should allow himself to be surprised in daily life: that he not be habit-bound or jaded; that he always have a sense of wonder about his life and the lives and words, gestures and images of others. One must always be ready for surprises.” (Joseph Zinker)

10.4.3 DO NOT BELIEVE

Facilitation is a style of group leadership that aims to empower those who are led. It doesn’t direct; it doesn’t prescribe; it doesn’t demand. It engenders healthy scepticism.

“Do not believe in what you have heard; do not believe in the traditions because they have been handed down for generations; do not believe in anything because it is rumoured or spoken by many; do not believe merely because a written statement of some old sage is produced; do not believe in conjectures; do not believe in that as truth to which you have become attached by habit; do not believe because of the authority of your teachers and elders. After observation and analysis, when it agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and gain of one and all, then accept it, practice it and live up to it.” (The Buddha 568-488BC)

10.5 ONE LAST ACTIVITY

One thing you can do as the last activity in facilitative groupwork is to hand the last activity over to the group. For example, in a problem-solving group, you could ask the group to put together a presentation of their findings to management. On a training course, you could ask the group to present a fun finale summing up what they’ve learnt. This works best when a group has fully reached their “group autumn” stage of development where they can show you how far they’ve come as individuals, learners and as a group.

10.6 PROCESS AND OUTCOMES

One of the things that people often come to realise in facilitative groupwork is that it is not necessary to reach the planned goal in order to have had a successful experience of groupwork. Goals are important but only because they allow us to go on a journey with others. It is this journey with others that counts, a journey on which we discover new insights, new friendships, and a new awareness about what we are capable of.

“The honey doesn’t taste so good once it is being eaten, the goal doesn’t mean so much once it’s been reached; the reward isn’t so rewarding once it’s been given...That doesn’t mean the goals we have don’t count. They do, mostly because they cause us to go through the process, and it’s the process that makes us wise, happy or whatever. If we do things in the wrong sort of way, it makes us miserable, angry, confused and things like that. The goal has to be right for us and it has to be beneficial, in order to ensure a beneficial process. But, aside from that, it’s really the process that’s important. Enjoyment of the process is the secret that erases the myths of the Great Reward...” (Benjamin Hoff: “The Tao of Pooh”)

10.7 EXISTENCE AS IT OUGHT TO BE

Writer Michael Novak says that when a collection of individuals first gells as a group, and stops being 5 individuals or 11 individuals and becomes a 5-headed unit or an 11-headed unit, you can almost hear the click. “A new kind of reality comes into existence at a new level of human development. For those who have participated in a group that has known the click of camaraderie, the experience is unforgettable, like that of having attained for a while at least a higher level of existence, existence as it ought to be.”

Some people describe the endings of facilitative groups as “lump-in-the-throat time” because of the very real emotional unravelling that takes place, not just between members of a group but also between the group and you as leader. When you experience these feelings, you can be sure that you have facilitated an experience that people will never forget.

10.8 KEY POINTS

1. If a group have gelled, the ending phase of groupwork can be tinged with real grief.
2. Not everyone will feel comfortable with the facilitated style, particularly those who prefer an authoritative leader.

3. The key to successful facilitation lies in putting aside your own needs in favour of the group's.
4. Although you are its leader, you are not responsible for what happens in the group.
5. A group that fears risk and learning may decide it is safer to turn the group experience into a talking shop.
6. Learn to trust what is happening in the group even though things may not be going to plan.

11 WEB RESOURCES ON FACILITATION SKILLS

The following instantly-accessible website resources provide more in-depth information on some of the tips, techniques, and features in this book.

Take the free e-course on Facilitation Skills from ManageTrainLearn here:

http://www.managetrainlearn.com/products-info/facilitationskills_the_e-course/

Download a wealth of materials for the training room in the Facilitation Skills E-Manual here here:

<http://www.managetrainlearn.com/product-info/mtl-e-manuals-facilitation-skills/>

Get 3 fully-resourced One-Day Course Plans on Facilitation Skills from ManageTrainLearn here:

<http://www.managetrainlearn.com/product-info/an-introduction-to-facilitation/>

Browse through our top 40 Teambuilders and download exactly the teambuilding game that's right for your course here:

<http://www.managetrainlearn.com/product-list/teambuilders>

For quick and memorable one-page SkillBoosters on Facilitation Skills, click here:

<http://www.managetrainlearn.com/product-info/skillboosters108/>

Subscribe to your own online course on Facilitation Skills and see how e-learning really works here:

<http://www.managetrainlearn.com/product-info/038-what-is-facilitation/>

If skills are important but time is precious, download the Flash based series of MTL Mini-Courses on Facilitation Skills here:

<http://www.managetrainlearn.com/product-info/mtl-mini-courses-facilitation-skills/>

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