Facilitation Skills

This short guide is intended for use as an aide memoire around good practice in Facilitations skills, and has been out together from the development and delegate's feedback of the Facilitation Skills training carried out with a client.

It covers:

1. ***What Facilitation is, and some of the key principles***
2. ***What makes a good Facilitator***
3. ***Points to note in preparing for a session***
4. ***Things to consider during a session***
5. ***Dealing with difficult and challenging behaviour***
6. ***Following up a session***

1. WHAT FACILITATION IS, AND THE KEY PRINCIPLES

- Facilitation literally means "to make easier" and provides a framework to solve a particular problem, gain consensus to a course of action, or mediate in a conflict.
- Usually carried out in either a large or small group setting
- Approaches such as group work, Action Learning, "world café", topic based or "free flow" (this in itself, is a separate fact sheet!)

What Facilitation is…on a good day

- Providing an objective eye
- It is the thing that's needed to get people out of routine, to stop people time wasting and to get things moving forward
- Can break through historical barriers, accepted ways of doing things, people playing games, providing a focus for some tangible outcomes

What Facilitation is…on a bad day

- The opportunity for someone to air their views….endlessly
- Re-work old hurts and "the way things used to be"
- End in recriminations, and acrimony
- Lack of clear outcomes, perhaps from lack of clear objectives

The skills of a good facilitator …	*Mirror*	Downfalls of a poor facilitator …
Being prepared **– know the materials and participants**		being unfamiliar with the materials and participants
Being aware **of the needs of participants:** – Before: e.g. appropriate materials and timetable – During: needs to be flexible		being unable to recognise the needs of participants either before or during the session unable to adapt accordingly
Understanding the limits **and** boundaries **of what the group can give**		being unable to know when to say 'no' in order to stay in control of a situation
Bringing people and ideas together **Acknowledging where good ideas are coming from**		being judgmental concentrating on those who speak most
Enabling **people**		trying to control discussions
Recognising **effort and struggle to participate** Encouraging **input, creating space for discussion and thinking**		being unenthusiastic or dismissive of people's views not allowing time for people to respond to questions or think through issues
Being aware of and using appropriate body language		using inappropriate body language (e.g. no eye-contact)
Establishing relationships **quickly e.g. making an effort to remember participants names**		being unable to establish relationships
Recognising "baggage" **and knowing when to deal with it**		diving straight into a programme before people are ready to do it
Managing time		poor time management
Being comfortable **and confident with themselves and their role**		being unclear about their role
Being skilled listeners		not listening and responding to people
Synthesising **ideas and dialogue** summarising and paraphrasing		being unable to summarise discussions and pull out main issues

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Core issues that need to be addressed are all the 'P's:

Preparation:

- **Place** – what is your environment will you have to make changes to enable it to be conclusive to facilitation (and then what would this be…..). For example, if you want to create an informal space where you encourage lots of participation, tables don't help. Best way is to set up a circle of chairs; it means people have to write notes on their laps, but creates involvement and fun
- **People** – who are the people that you will be working with and what do you need to know about them before you start. It's useful to know which organisation they are from, and whether you have a lot of different types of people attending, or whether a more discreet group
- **Purpose** – What is it that you want to achieve with them – goals, objectives etc. This is usually done through some kind of course outline, and also useful to have a Facilitators outline, which can be as simple as the following template with a worked example of :

TIME	ACTIVITY	RESOURCES
9.30-10am	**Overview and Introductions** - Overview of the session - Approach and style of the session - Establishing shared objectives	**PowerPoint** **Objective setting exercise and introductions using the 4 quadrants exercise; what you want from today**

4. THINGS TO CONSIDER DURING A SESSION

Core skills that need to be covered in any session include:

1. Setting some ground rules
2. Being clear about the purpose of the session and the parameters exist on the session
3. Listening skills
4. Looking for non verbal behaviour in the participants and being aware of your own non verbal communication
5. Interpreting 2 and 3 as you go along
6. Keeping the group on task but not shutting them down in terms of the discussion
7. Managing difficult and challenging behaviour
8. Summing up and synthesising what has been said and/or agreed by the group

Body Language (Non Verbal Communication)

Introduction

Body language is the means by which humans (and other animals) convey information through conscious or sub conscious gestures, movements or facial expressions.

It is either a replacement for speech (conscious and unconscious), to reinforce speech, and as a mirror or a betrayer of mood.

It has become a whole science in itself – KINESICS is the study of communication by the bodily movements used when people talk to each other. PROXEMICS is the study of how people use the space around them to convey information nonverbally.

People usually underestimate the power of non-verbal communication and tend not to plan or consciously think about it when communicating, for example when in a coaching situation. The following tips are designed to act as an 'aide memoir' for your sessions.

Tips and tricks

- **Hands** convey many messages and can be the most mobile parts of your body when communicating. Avoid pointing and jabbing, making fists (they represent forcefulness and power) 'chopping motions' and 'windmills'! Be wary of hands in pockets (the dreaded loose change moment), and fiddling with anything else is very distracting for your client/colleague. Generally palms facing out represent rejection and cupped palms/facing in represents inclusion and acceptance.

- **Body posture** is also important to get right, avoid 'closed' gestures such as crossed arms/legs and turning away from your clients/colleagues. Hands on hips can be seen as pompous and slightly aggressive.

- **Using your space** as well as preparing your space for your coaching session, think about how much of it you will use. Think about the distance between your chairs, if you are using a table and privacy issues.

- **Connecting with your clients** this is vital to engage them and make them feel comfortable and secure. Eye contact is the main tool here; consciously look at your client – but don't stare them out! The biggest trap to fall into is the 'faraway look 'where you are focussed in a mid way point above their head – not good.

- **Your appearance** whilst we would all like to think that this doesn't matter – it does. It's not about impressing anyone but feeling comfortable in

yourself and not wearing items that seriously distract the client (elaborate jewellery, loud shirts/ties and low necklines for example).

- **Mirroring your client,** remember to try and mirror your client when you can and when it's appropriate. For example if they have become quiet and contemplative then you need to respect this and choose the opportune moment to ask a question or prompt more discussion. The trick is to recognise what is thinking from boredom! If you think that they are bored or have lost interest albeit momentarily, then ask a question, take a break/breather, set them a short task.
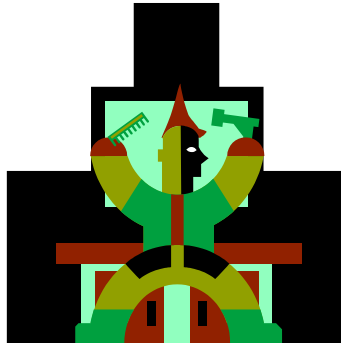
- **Be aware of the non-verbal signs of your client** if you spot signs of dissent/disagreement/confusions/boredom then act on it appropriately. Don't delay; your client is relying on you to read the signs.

- **Finally, be yourself and know yourself** you don't have to entertain your client, you can't make it all better but you can guide them to understand where they are, and what they can do about it.

Capturing the discussion/meeting etc: how to use a flipchart effectively

Don't dismiss flip charts, they are portable and can be useful in limited venues or when you are working with small groups. You can prepare them just like any other AVA.

Do's

- Write in large script and space out your text
- Use 'post its' to mark your prepared pages
- Prepare as much as possible, you can write in pencil calculations that the audience will not be able to see
- Use different colours and symbols to highlight key points, good/bad
- Stand back from the flipchart to allow everyone to see
- Check with participants to see if the text is big enough for everyone to see
- Use 'post it' flip charts to stick directly on wall OR make sure that you have blu tak
- Have one person to scribe, one to handle the discussion if you are not keen
- 'Code' your flip chart to help you structure feedback, this may mean nothing to them but everything to you!
- Précis some of your text to key points and concepts

- Remember if you 'brainstorm' it is etiquette to record all of the feedback and not interpret what people are saying
- Experiment with drawings they can help people remember ideas, concepts

Don'ts

- Obscure the chart by standing directly in front of it
- Don't write to small
- Dark pens are a must
- Don't speak while you are writing unless you're very confident!
- Avoid acronyms TLA's (three letter words)

5. DEALING WITH DIFFICULT AND CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR

This is a challenging area, and thinking about the way people work in groups, there will always be people who are more talkative and more to say than others. There may well be people who are disengaged, or have opinions on everything, so the Facilitator needs to think beforehand about ways of dealing with this behaviour, should it occur in a session. It's also important to bring agreement on acceptable/unacceptable behaviours at the contracting/ground rules stage at the start of the session, and refer back to these if necessary.

Here are a few typical examples, with some suggestions for dealing with:

Rubbishes other people's views without suggesting anything better • Ask the person directly for an "issues-solutions" approach • Quiet 1-1 word at the break, looking for constructive input • Encourage peer views on input, as peers will often do the job of the facilitation, if asked	**Dominates discussions** • Consider how valid the input is; if its helping the discussion, can go with the flow, but other peoples non verbal signals will give a clue as to whether they are interested • Thank the person for the input, but state that you would like to share and experience other views as well
Does not contribute at all • Quiet word at the break to ask if they are OK, and what they are getting from the session • Might be perceived by some as too confrontational, but can ask permission from the group to ask people direct questions; "what are your thoughts on this?"	**Arrives late** • Should be dealt with at contracting stage • Be careful not to be too indulgent, and start the session again for the benefit of one; you can always brief them at one of the breaks

6. FOLLOWING UP A SESSION

- There is usually some sort of summary/write up of the key points and actions from the session required, and needed, as a record, and to achieve any kind of sustainability from what's been discussed
- Try to be imaginative in the summary; can you use pictures/images from the day itself? At Away Days for example, when people are working on exercises, good to capture these digitally, and use in the summary
- There is also usually some kind of evaluation process, which asks people for immediate reflection on the usefulness of the day; questions like these are useful to get feedback: what did you enjoy/find most useful about the session? Any changes/improvements would you recommend? (E.g. regarding the venue/materials/Facilitator/content etc.) How useful do you anticipate the session has been for you and the team? Please indicate any action you will be taking following the session
- This should be integrated into the Session summary to go back to the delegates