

## FACILITATION FOR THE ARTS WORKS

### WHAT IS FACILITATION?

Facilitation is a simple concept that however can be difficult to understand. Facilitation, for example is not about training. The professional facilitator uses 'methods' to structure group activities in such a way that the desired outcome is reached. This may be a strategic document or to formulate a consensed opinion of an idea or suggestion.

'Pure' or 'academic' facilitation states the facilitator should be entirely neutral not adding to the group interaction. However it is in our experience that the role of a facilitator can be augmented by not being neutral in two ways - 1) subject matter experience can in fact help the group when wide knowledge is not present in the group and 2) credibility - this is important to specific sector groups; for instance, airline pilots or musicians tend not to respond to group methods if the facilitator is seen as not to have any relevance or connection with their expertise.

Selected Wikipedia articles define facilitation as follows...

*Facilitation in business, organizational development (OD), and in consensus decision-making refers to the process of designing and running a successful meeting.*

*Facilitation concerns itself with all the tasks needed to run a productive and impartial meeting. Facilitation serves the needs of any group who are meeting with a common purpose, whether it be making a decision, solving a problem, or simply exchanging ideas and information.*

A facilitator is

*"An individual who enables groups and organizations to work more effectively; to collaborate and achieve synergy. He or she is a 'content neutral' party who by not taking sides or expressing or advocating a point of view during the meeting, can advocate for fair, open, and inclusive procedures to accomplish the group's work"*

*"One who contributes structure and process to interactions so groups are able to function effectively and make high-quality decisions. A helper and enabler whose goal is to support others as they achieve exceptional performance"*

*"... to support everyone to do their best thinking and practice. To do this, the facilitator encourages full participation, promotes mutual understanding and cultivates shared responsibility. By supporting everyone to do their best thinking, a facilitator enables group members to search for inclusive solutions and build sustainable agreements".*

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The International Association of Facilitators (of which g43 is a member at Certified Professional Facilitator level) has a series of core competencies which are...

- **Create Collaborative Client Relationships** – The Facilitator prepares properly to meet client needs.
- **Plan Appropriate Group Processes** – The Facilitator designs and selects the right processes and tools that deliver the agreed to outcome while supporting a diverse group of participants, characteristics, and thinking styles to reach consensus.
- **Create and Sustain a Participatory Environment** – The Facilitator is able to manage communication, creativity, conflict, and encourage participation.
- **Guide Group to Appropriate and Useful Outcomes** – The Facilitator is able to execute the designed processes, guide the group, stay on track, and achieve the desired outcome.
- **Build and Maintain Professional Knowledge** – The Facilitator continues to be part of the profession and continues to learn new concepts and ideas.
- **Model Positive Professional Attitude** – The Facilitator is able to remain neutral, act with integrity, and be self-aware.

An example of the successful application of the above competencies is in facilitating effective meetings.

### DEFINE 'EFFECTIVE MEETINGS'?

Sometimes it seems as if we're always meeting. We have our regular monthly organization meetings, special task force meetings to work on, urgent actions, and committee meetings for projects the group has taken on. Meetings take up so much of our time because they're the way we make decisions, plan actions, and move the work along.

But how many of us hate meetings? We all of have memories of meetings (maybe even last night's committee meeting) that seem to last forever and no decisions ever get made. Someone kept interrupting and moving everyone off of the agenda, the chair had too many of her own opinions, the meeting ran overtime, and by the time it was over, everyone went home tired and unsatisfied.

Well, while there's no magic wand to make every meeting more effective, meetings can really help in decision making and planning. They don't have to be painful. But they can be effective. And you can learn how to make your meetings both useful and enjoyable for everyone there. Effective meetings help a group reach its goals.

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## WHY DO YOU NEED EFFECTIVE MEETINGS?

Did you know that how a meeting is managed and run is one of the biggest "risk factors" for participation and member investment in your organization? All of the parts of a meeting are important--planning (especially thinking through agendas and goals); logistics. All of these parts impact on member participation and involvement.

Each "phase" needs to be paid attention to and taken seriously because good meeting management is critically linked to participation. It is through meetings that the group is or is not able to get things done, solve problems, manage itself in a way that promotes inclusion and safety, and creates a sense of community. A facilitator ensures participation whilst staying focussed on the desired outcome (say a draft Five-Year strategy). Attendees are involved and engaged, the objective is met, not only is the meeting efficient, but the team is working together efficiently and the input to the objective is efficient too.

There are two types of meetings – one that meets its objective and another that doesn't. The difference is that one is facilitated whilst the other is not.

This is the value of a facilitator.