



 APMG International

The Value of Facilitation

BY TONY MANN

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THE PURPOSE OF THIS PAPER

There is a strong moral and financial rationale to involve and engage people who will be affected by big decisions.

This paper outlines the importance of facilitation as a key, generic skill in all sectors of the economy. It proposes that people need to develop the skills to be able to facilitate successfully in any context. These skilled facilitators should be accorded similar status to that of project managers. Thus, there should be opportunities for facilitators to be trained, assessed and certified in a similar way to project managers.

Setting the scene

At present, times are tough financially and commercially. They also challenge our values and emotions. Organizations and their people face hard decisions in managing change. There are essentially two – opposing – philosophies to making these decisions.

One emphasises the leader as the person who knows best and feels it's her/his responsibility to tell others what should happen. To avoid conflict and challenge from the people they manage, it's easier and less confrontational to 'tell' those people 'the way forward'.

The other approach is, admittedly, more difficult but more inclusive. It asks questions and engages people. With appropriate leadership, teams, groups, stakeholders and even whole communities can be encouraged to be participative. There is a strong moral and financial rationale to involve and engage people who will be affected by big decisions. This can be brought about by effective facilitation.

People who develop this craft of facilitation could offer organizations the appropriate approach to use in tough situations. They could add real value to organizations and the economy as a whole. Under guidance from a skilled facilitator, meetings and workshops will achieve the desired outcomes with speed and efficiency. Management teams using a collaborative, facilitative style are discovering that, performed appropriately, facilitation can deliver outcomes in an effective, timely and constructive way that won't compromise on key issues.

Facilitation

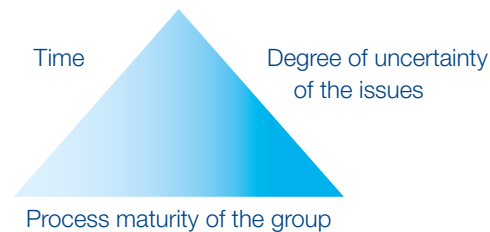
Facilitation is a basic life skill that can be used – profitably – to:

- **Identify issues**
- **Resolve problems**
- **Encourage productive interaction**
- **Develop accurate objectives**
- **Define the scope of change projects**
- **Encourage and empower contributions in a safe, non-threatening environment**
- **Engage stakeholders.**

Facilitation can support organizations, enabling people to work in a collaborative, participative way to tackle key issues and make fundamental decisions. Effective facilitation can make the difference between a poor and a brilliant decision. It can make the difference between a solution that has hidden problems and one that is robust.

FACILITATORS

A facilitator provides a method and a means to deliver answers to complex issues in an operational context without necessarily being a subject matter expert. They need to balance time, the degree of uncertainty of the issues and the process maturity of the organization / group - and help the task leader to find the best possible process.



Facilitators must use the right model/tool in the right place to get the most helpful answer, allowing groups to make decisions and reach a lasting, robust agreement which has commitment and buy-in. They must understand the continuum of decision making and change which identifies the best tool or technique to use depending on the seriousness/significance of the decision/ situation, the time available and the need for the workforce emotionally and mentally – to commit to the decision.

Facilitators need to build a comprehensive catalogue of:

- **Approaches**
- **Models**
- **Tools**
- **Techniques**

They use these to help groups make the appropriate decisions for different levels of:

- **Uncertainty**
- **Emotional disruption**
- **Urgency**
- **Need for buy-in**
- **Organizational maturity**

This gives organizations an effective participative change management toolkit. Moreover, they can use facilitation as a core management skill and, potentially, as a core process within the organization.

The facilitator is always:

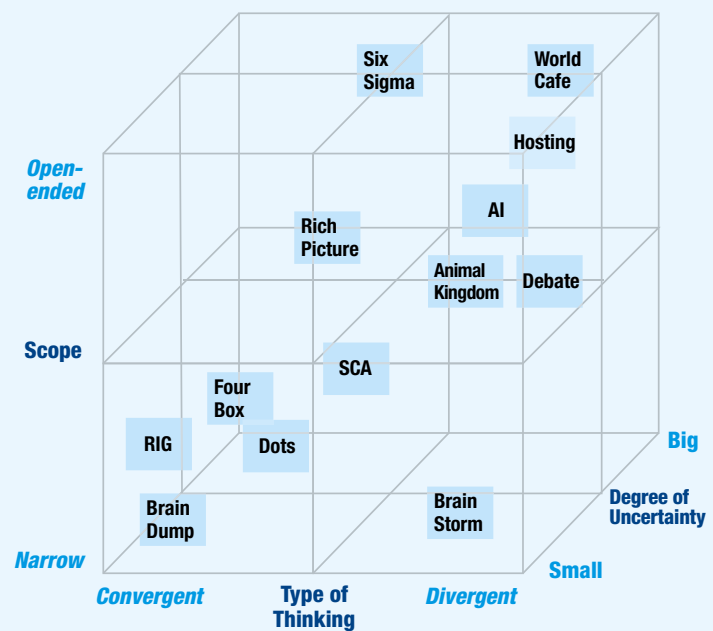
- **Active, striving to keep the momentum going**
- **Checking understanding so that people are engaged**
- **Selecting the appropriate model or tool to take things forward**

MODELS, TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

Having selected the most appropriate format, the facilitator can focus on the most appropriate models, tools and techniques to employ.

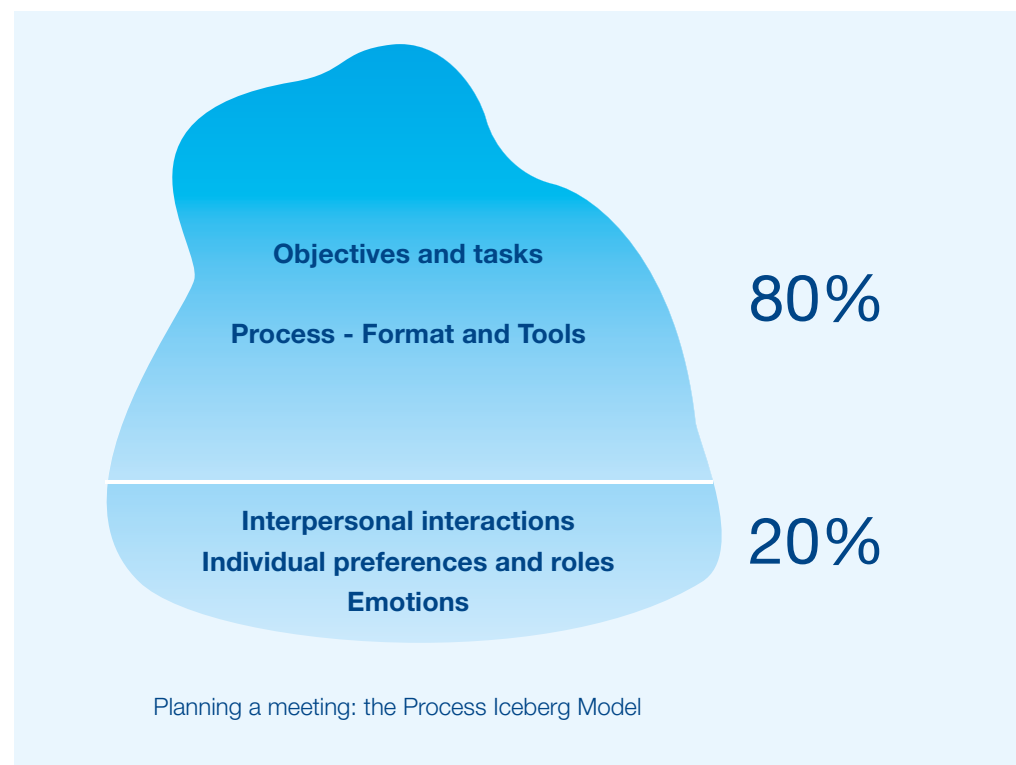


Facilitators can use a three-dimensional framework to systematize the various models, tools and techniques.



People don't normally set out to sabotage meetings. Ill-defined objectives, unrelated tasks and badly applied process cause people to react negatively.

Tony Mann's 'Process Iceberg® Meeting Model' illustrates that, if a facilitator identifies the appropriate objectives and defines the sub-tasks needed to achieve the outcomes, along with the process (format and tools), then 80 per cent of the group's problems disappear. Essentially people don't normally set out to sabotage meetings. Ill-defined objectives, unrelated tasks and badly applied process cause people to react negatively.



Objectives and Tasks

Any objective can be divided into sub-elements, which further delineate the nature of the task:

OBJECTIVE



Tasks



Activities

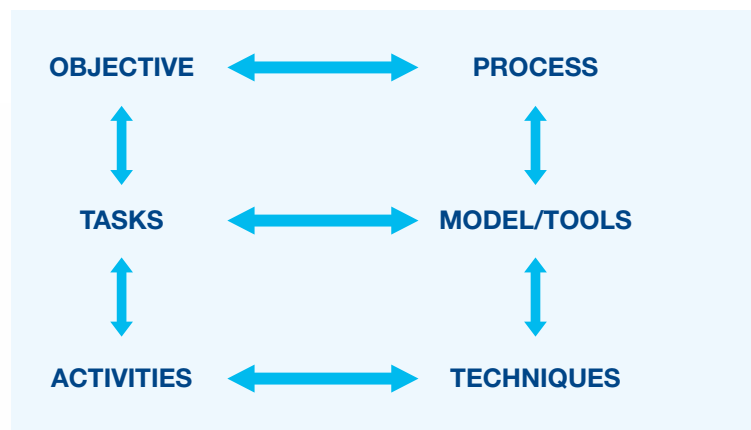
The Task is the issue facing the group. This does not constitute process. Task and process are symbiotically connected but fundamentally different. In addition to a group defining the task, it needs to identify how to tackle it.

FACILITATORS AND TASK LEADERS

In any use of facilitation, there are task issues (the task leader's responsibility) and process methods (the facilitator's responsibility). The facilitator should have an ally in the task leader – that is, the person responsible for the event's success.

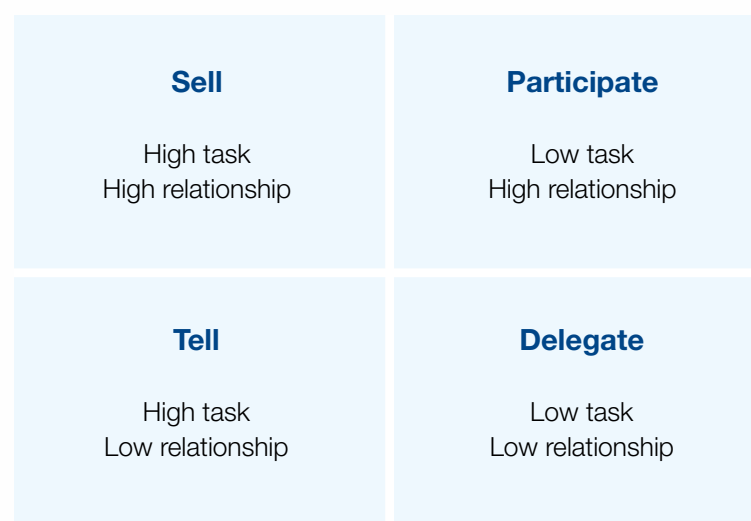
As each objective is defined, the tasks necessary to deliver the outcome are identified. This is linked to an appropriate (facilitation) process to achieve the objective. This process is a combination of tools, techniques and format.

Facilitators focus on process in order to help the group deliver the task outcomes. So, tasks, objectives and activities, along with facilitation tools/ techniques, models and processes are inter-linked thus:



The links between tasks, objectives, activities, along with facilitation tools/techniques, models and processes

Task leaders have an implied contract with the group they lead. This tends to fall into one of four categories:



The task leader's contract with the group: four main options

In any use of facilitation, there are task issues (the task leader's responsibility) and process methods (the facilitator's responsibility).

Red and Green Thinking

Task and process can be differentiated by viewing things to do with task as being red thinking and those things to do with process as being green thinking. The task leader (living in the 'red') and facilitator (operating in the 'green') should never merge.

Merging these roles results in 'falipulation', where the group is manipulated via facilitation to achieve the results that the task leader/ facilitator wanted rather than those the group would have produced had it been free to do so.

The red zone – the task leader's prerogative – covers the agenda process of defining objectives, tasks and the degree of uncertainty. The green zone – the facilitator's responsibility – involves defining the process, time available and preparation.

There must be clarity between the two, however the two are symbiotic and will run in parallel.

The degree of uncertainty

In defining the objectives and tasks, task leaders must account for the degree of uncertainty involved. There can be:

- **Certainty: the issue is clear and the answer can be easily obtained from the people in the group.**
- **Complexity: the issue is relatively clear but the appropriate solution must be developed.**
- **Uncertainty: even the nature of the issue, problem or question is unclear, so it must be defined and clarified. Only then can a solution be explored.**

Process

Process – the means of production – takes raw materials (ideas) and turns them into a finished product (decisions) with the minimum of waste (effort) through the maximization of the resources (people's time) available.

Process awareness

A group goes through three stages:

- **Dysfunctional. There is strong leadership and the group's agenda is set.**
- **Transitional. There is a marked absence of process. The group begins to use different formats and procedures to increase its flexibility. Interactions within the group increase and the group begins to take an active interest in the process.**
- **Process Aware. The group recognizes uncertainty and adapts the process to cope with this. Individuals take responsibility for the process.**

The group moves from being dysfunctional to transitional initially by the leader relinquishing control to the process. The facilitator engenders in the group a willingness to try different techniques.

The group then begins to recognize the part that process plays in achieving an effective outcome – and how much time is needed.

The group moves from being transitional to process aware as it uses appropriate techniques to tackle the task and resolves to be willing to work in complexity – not avoid it.

Format

Format is the application of people to process. There are four, fundamental facilitation formats:

- **All – each person works on her/his own, so no one is influenced by anyone else.**
- **Group – working in subgroups to examine different issues or give different perspectives on the same issue.**
- **All to one – everyone does the activity, directing their outputs to one person.**
- **One to all – one person does the activity to, or on behalf of, everyone so everyone knows what needs to be known.**

Each of these approaches has advantages and disadvantages:

FORMAT	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
ALL	Everyone gets an opportunity to input their ideas/thoughts/perceptions	It takes more time to collate the input from everyone and “cluster”/analyse it
ALL TO ONE	There is an opportunity to “bounce” off others thoughts and it takes less time to elicit the thoughts/ideas	The opinion of individuals can be lost and the opinion of one or two people can hold sway
GROUP	The opinion of different or “constituencies” can be developed or cross-cutting groups can be provided a mix of opinions/perceptions	The group format still needs another format to make it effective (eg ALL)
ONE TO ALL	There is an opportunity to save time and effort by getting expert input	If the expert isn’t well directed it can turn into a “solo” self-centred presentation.

Two simple tools to help a group focus on process are 'The feedback model' and 'Summarize – Propose – Outcome (SPO)'.

Selecting the appropriate format depends on the time available and the group's level of process awareness.

Format

Each of these formats produces a different outcome and either supports the process or works against it. The rationale for using each format is:

FORMAT	RATIONALE
ALL	This approach is used when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - there are dominant people in the group and you want people to work independently, free of others' influence - you want everyone's own thoughts/ideas /input
ALL TO ONE	This approach is used when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - you want cross fertilization of ideas - there is no danger of dominations by individuals
GROUP	This is used when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - there are different constituencies in the room and you want to reflect different perspectives
ONE TO ALL	This is used when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - there is an expert in the room who can steer the group by giving their expert input (first).

Process tools

Two simple tools – among many – to help a group focus on 'process' are:

■ The Feedback Model:

The use of the Feedback Model is essentially someone 'feeding back' to the person speaking or to the group what they understood the person to be saying. So, they might say; "If I understand you correctly what you're saying is that if we don't get all the necessary systems in place by next month the launch will fail and we could lose customer confidence?"

In this way the person who made the statement can assess whether they made themselves clear. They might have been wholly misunderstood - see '1' below. In which case they will want to find a better/clearer way of making their point. Or, perhaps the person feeding back might have seen the implications of what the speaker was saying and would in essence have got a '4'. In this case the speaker might say something like: "Yes. I'd hadn't seen it as seriously as that - but you're right".

There are four levels of feedback which the facilitator listens out for and then acts accordingly. Ideally a group that is maturing will do the feedback. However, the facilitator must be ready to do the feedback if the group is unwilling to do it.

1. Misunderstanding or misinterpreting (unintentionally) what was said
2. Missing out some important points or details
3. Feeding back accurately and fully what was said
4. Getting behind the message's words.

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Summarize – Propose – Outcome/ Output (SPO)

The Summary expresses what the group is wanting to achieve (the task). The Proposal lays out (often in detail) the suggested process (format and model/tool/ technique) and the Outcome demonstrates how this will achieve the desired result. This is powerful because it:

- Connects 'red' and 'green'
- Demonstrates the significance of 'green' in tackling the task
- Allows the group to take responsibility by enabling it to challenge the S, P or O and, thus, become more aware of process thinking
- Introduces models, tools and techniques in context and demonstrates their appropriate use
- Gives anyone the ability to introduce process.

Using a Systematic Task/Process Approach

Management decisions can go awry because of failure to take into account all the stages of situational analysis and solution finding. Effective facilitation mirrors the Six Sigma approach and provides 'process' to support a nine-step approach:

- 1 Identify Issues** – suspending judgement about causes
- 2 Focus on the Main Issue(s)/Causes(s)** – having identified all the issues, you can identify the key ones
- 3 Define the Problem** – to ensure that everyone works to the same agenda
- 4 Find the Main Causes**
- 5 Select the Criteria for an Effective Solution**
- 6 Generate Ideas for Potential Solutions – some are:**
 - Adaptive – rather than taking the problem away, find a way around it
 - Corrective – correct aspects of the process to solve the problem
 - Preventative – ensure that it can't happen again
- 7 Pinpoint the Most Appropriate Solution**
- 8 Adverse Consequences** – a solution may solve a problem but cause another
- 9 Action Planning** – plan the implementation of the solution.

CONCLUSIONS

Organizations are under constant pressure to become more competitive and provide greater value for money. The need for high quality facilitation to enable and empower organizations to operate efficiently and effectively has never been greater.

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Organizations are under constant pressure to become more competitive and/or provide greater value for money for their stakeholders. There is a strong moral reason to discover and gauge the views of the workforce/community where they are personally involved in resolving issues. Moreover, the positive engagement of the workforce produced by effective facilitation adds value to organizations in all sectors of the economy.

Effective facilitation enables organizations to be successful in tackling issues that are uncertain. It will help them handle emotions and challenges to people's core values.

Thus, the whole economy should benefit from this since, under the guidance of accredited/ certified facilitators, meetings and workshops will achieve their desired outcomes in a timely, constructive way.

This strategy requires organizations to embed facilitation as part of the business culture and in so doing deliver best practice, increase competitiveness and buy-in.

One of the key ways to manage and embrace this change in approach to facilitation is to invest in structured and accredited facilitation.

By Tony Mann

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+44 (0) 1494 452450



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