

WHAT IS **FACILITATION**?



In the same series:

“What is Conflict?”

“What is Interpersonal Communication?”

“What is Negotiation?”

“What is Ethnic Conflict?”

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WHAT IS FACILITATION?

Did you ever become a member of a new group and it was difficult for you to feel part of the group?

- You didn't know everybody, and some of the new faces didn't make you feel comfortable;
- You feared you were not able to cope - everybody else seemed better informed and more sure of themselves than you;
- It was only with difficulty that you decided to say something.

Did you ever participate in work meetings in which things didn't go enough smoothly?

- You were not sure what the subject was because the discussion involved more subjects at the same time;
- You were not able to comment because some spoke all the time and wanted to show they knew it all;
- Initially you were a bit confused as to the subject of the meeting and you left having even more doubts about what you were supposed to do.

When you had to find solutions to a problem working a group did you discover that it was a difficult process?

- There were different opinions about how the issue should be approached which generated heated discussions;
- Each wanted to impose his / her own ideas and didn't seem interested in your ideas;
- You were not sure what were the items in respect of which there were differences in opinion because every one skipped from one issue to the other and talked at the same time;
- Although, personally, you did not agree with the adopted solution, you did not have the opportunity to express your point of view and in fact it was the majority that made the decision.

We are sure you have experienced in one moment of your life at least one of the aspects described above!

Do you think there are solutions that eliminate or improve these aspects?

Do you think someone could help us work more effectively in a group and avoid conflicting situations?

We believe that this is possible and the answer is in this brochure: the solution is called facilitation and the person who does it is called a facilitator!

So, what do you think facilitation is?

We propose two definitions, each pointing out to situations that require facilitation:

1. GROUP / TEAM WORK FACILITATION:

A process in which a neutral person (who is accepted by all group members and has no decision making authority) helps a group identify, solve problems and take decisions, in an effective way.

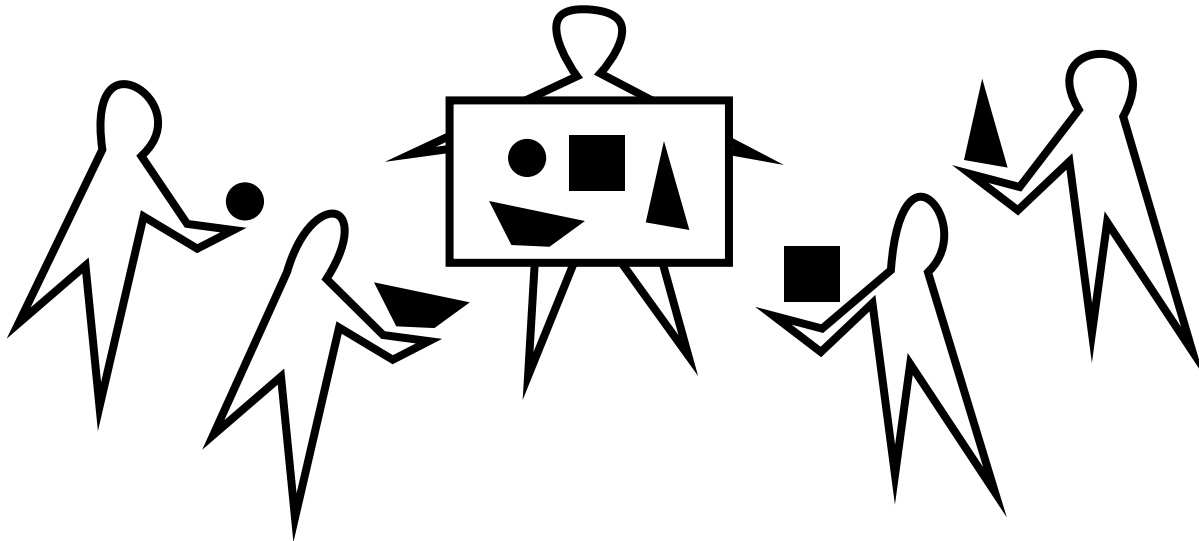
Roger Schwarz

2. PROBLEM SOLVING PROCESSES IN A GROUP / PUBLIC DEBATE:

The effort of a neutral person with no decision making authority, accepted by all the group members, who helps the parties in a problem solving process (or public debate), negotiate an agreement / memorandum / decision by creating the appropriate framework for all to participate in discussions, analyses and decision making.

Allen Zarkin

The first definition brings the activity of the facilitator closer to that of a moderator, the second definition brings it closer to that of a mediator, in the sense that the probability of differences and conflicting situations is recognized from the very beginning.



WHAT A FACILITATOR SHOULD KNOW

Facilitation is generally associated with the activity of trainers and consultants, because it relies on *shared skills and abilities* - that of working with people (groups), and preparing and conducting group processes, and because it relies on a *shared common goal* - that of helping people find solutions to the problems they are facing and accomplish the tasks and goals of the group / organization more easily and successfully.

The main task of the facilitator is to help a team / group to work as efficiently as possible to accomplish the proposed tasks.

Although briefly stated, the task of the facilitator is a complex one, and that is why we intend to approach the facilitation activity in relation with the group processes it is supposed to help and conduct:

- a) **Team building process:** encouraging members to become acquainted with each other, cooperate and develop relations amongst themselves, as well as motivating team members;
- b) **Group communication process:** contributing to the development of efficient communication during work meetings, helping avoid misunderstandings and conflict escalation;
- c) **Group decision making process:** helping build consensus throughout the process;
- d) **Participatory planning process (group problem solving):** guiding the group to follow a logical path in problem solving - from problem identification to strategy and action plans development for the purpose of solving problems.

This Brochure will only address the first three processes. The problem solving process will make the object of another brochure.

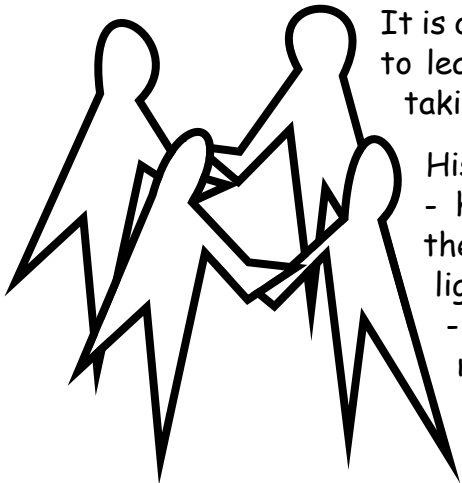
A. TEAM BUILDING PROCESS

We use the term *team* when we refer to a group that has decided to work together for the purpose of accomplishing a task, or meeting a common goal. Every time the team members work together, there is a need for someone to help the team work efficiently, so that it obtains the desired results as soon as possible! As we explained before, this person is the facilitator!

In order to become a team, a group goes through several development stages, of which we believe the following to be very important:

PERFORMING
NORMING
FORMING

1. FORMING



It is only natural for the team and its members to take time to learn how to work together. The facilitator is the one taking the team through this learning process.

His / her task at this stage is to:

- help the team members get to know or rediscover themselves in the new context (review of relations in light of the new task);
- clarify or verify the clarity of the goals the team must meet;
- help the team define its work style.

The members of a new team usually need clear answers to the following questions:



"Why was I appointed to work in this team?"

"What is it expected of us as a team?"

"How can we work together as a team to obtain the expected results?"

"What authority and what resources do we have available to fulfill our tasks?"

The task of the facilitator at this stage is to help the team members find answers to the questions above, and develop constructive cooperative relations with the other members!

This begins by organizing and conducting the first work meeting.

A facilitator must know that, in general, an efficient meeting:

- generates information and opinions;
- clarifies the problems and issues discussed;
- provides explanations;
- provides conclusions;
- verifies consensus on conclusions.

A possible activity list to prepare this first meeting is presented below:

Meeting preparation

- Make sure all persons appointed to be part of the team have been notified and that the structure of the team is appropriate (all important actors are represented);
- Decide on a meeting place and verify that the space is appropriate for the conditions needed (large enough to accommodate all the participants, the right type of furniture, appropriate equipments available);
- Prepare the meeting agenda:
 - Formulate goals and objectives (what results you expect at the end of the meeting);
 - What should be discussed or what should happen during the meeting to obtain the desired results;
 - Establish the duration and sequence of activities;
- Finalize the agenda for the participants and send it together with the invitation letters.

An example of the team forming meeting process is provided below:

First Meeting Objectives (Facilitator's agenda)

- Get to know the team members;
- Clarify the tasks of the team;
- Establish team work rules and procedures .

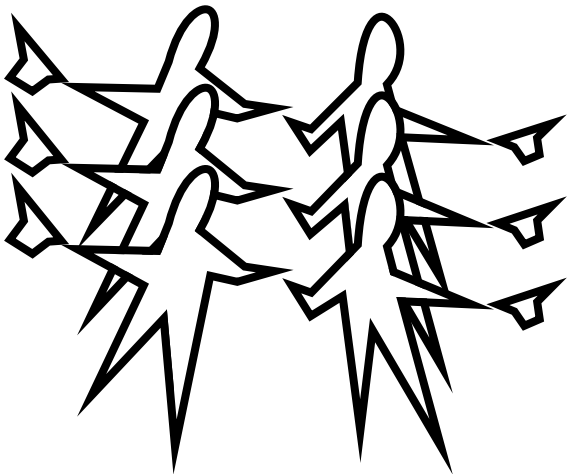
Step 1: Objectives and agenda

Present meeting objectives and obtain agreement on the subjects to be discussed and proposed duration of the meeting.

Step 2: Introduction of participants

There are several ways to organize the introduction of participants depending on the amount of time available, the participants' profile and whether they know each other or not.

EXAMPLE:



You can invite them to introduce themselves, in pairs, giving them 2 minutes each to find out about certain information about his / her partner.

If participants know each other, in addition to the basic information (name, how to call each other, position and title) you can also ask questions that provide more information with respect to the professional or personal qualities of the participants, which will be useful to the team in fulfilling its tasks.

It is useful to add questions that help establish a positive atmosphere such as those that give participants the opportunity to talk about achievements they take pride in, or personal qualities.

Step 3: Fears, expectations, motivations

At this stage, the facilitator may expect the group to be silent, reserved and even display resistance. This atmosphere may be explained by the feeling of uncertainty created by the fears and questions that participants usually have when faced with a new situation, new people they don't know.

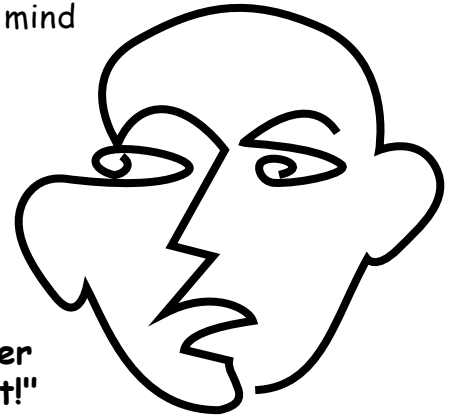
Here are some of the most frequent questions in the mind of team members during the first meeting:

"What will happen during this meeting?"

"How do I look / behave compared to the others?
Do the others know more than I do?"

"What if I don't manage? Do I risk making a fool
of myself?"

In conclusion, the general reaction is one saying: **"I'd better say nothing until I understand what it's all about!"**



There are no safe recipes to match every occasion, but the team-forming meeting must find the right formula so that the participants openly express their opinions with respect to the activity of the new team:

- What motivates you to be a member of this team?
- What problems do you expect as a member of this team?
- What do you expect from the team?
- What can you offer the team?
- How do you see your team if everything would go very well?
- How do you see your team if nothing would go well?

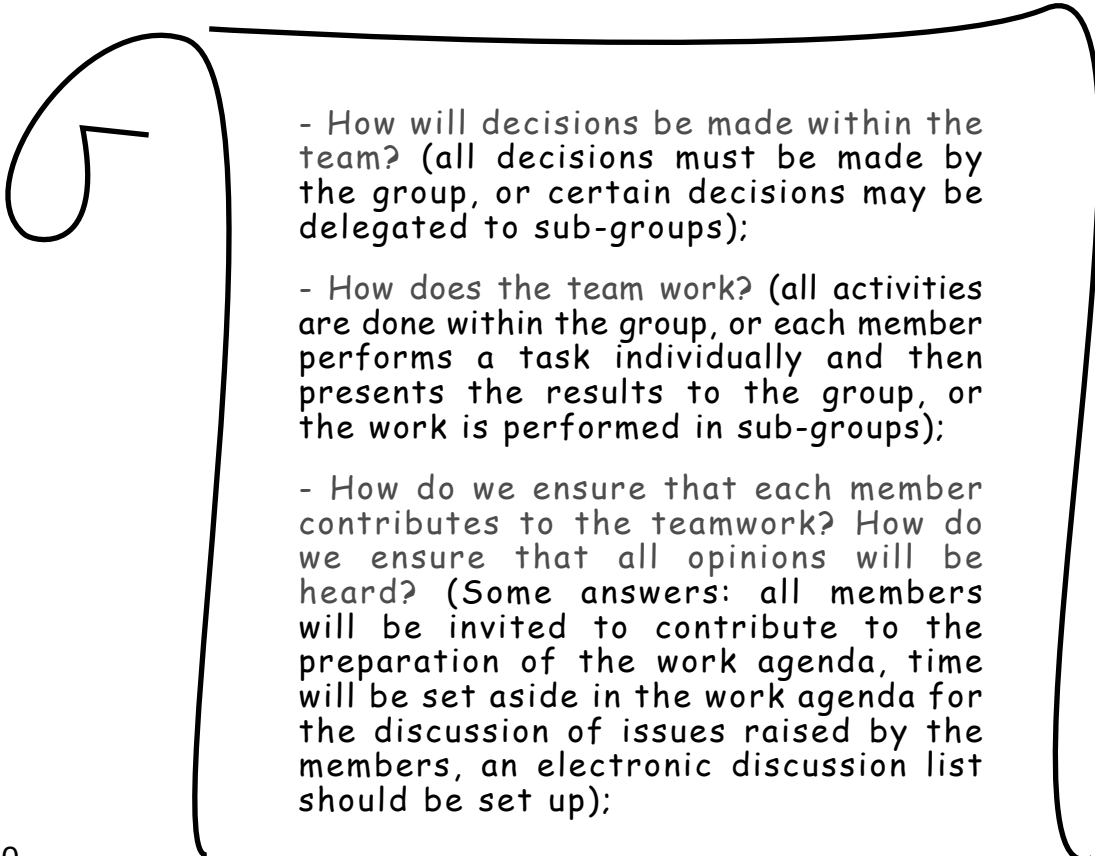
Step 4: Mission and activities

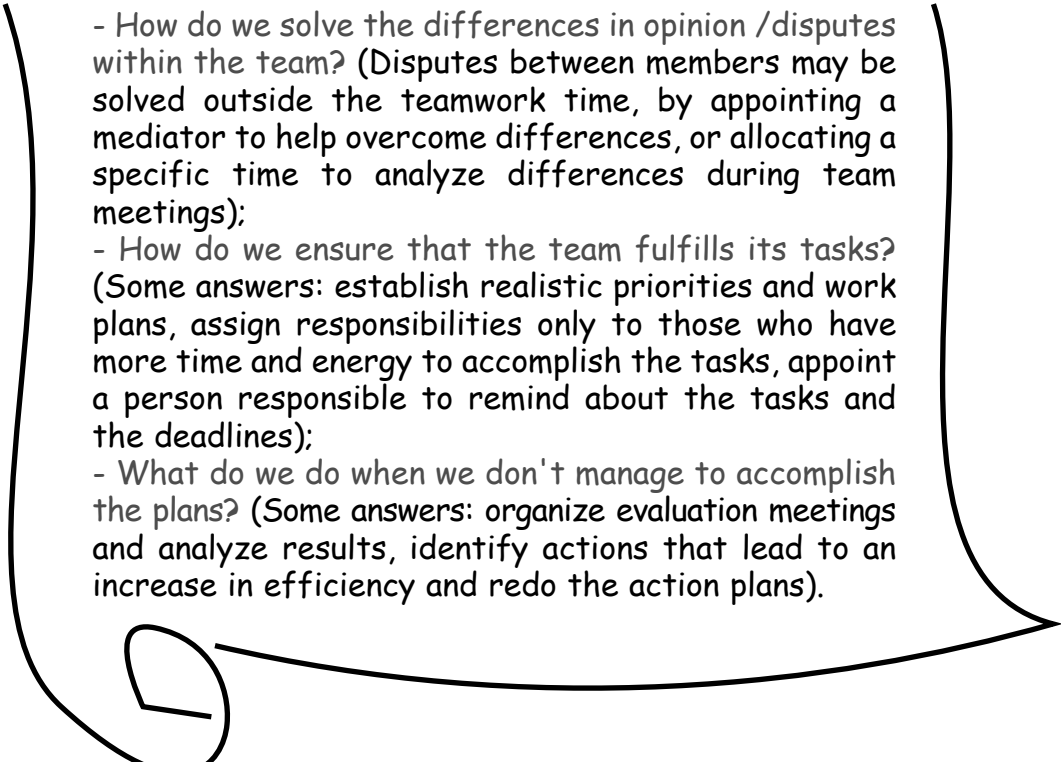
The facilitator is responsible to help the team members understand the mission of the team, the activities that must be implemented and their calendar. The clarity of the results and acceptance of the objectives to be achieved by the team will help everyone in the future to define his / her role and contribution to the expected results.

Step 5: Work rules and procedures

Clear definition of these rules and procedures helps avoid confusion and misunderstanding, the principal source of conflict for a team.

The areas in which we consider it is useful to help the team clarify its rules and procedures are as follows:

- 
- How will decisions be made within the team? (all decisions must be made by the group, or certain decisions may be delegated to sub-groups);
 - How does the team work? (all activities are done within the group, or each member performs a task individually and then presents the results to the group, or the work is performed in sub-groups);
 - How do we ensure that each member contributes to the teamwork? How do we ensure that all opinions will be heard? (Some answers: all members will be invited to contribute to the preparation of the work agenda, time will be set aside in the work agenda for the discussion of issues raised by the members, an electronic discussion list should be set up);

- 
- How do we solve the differences in opinion /disputes within the team? (Disputes between members may be solved outside the teamwork time, by appointing a mediator to help overcome differences, or allocating a specific time to analyze differences during team meetings);
 - How do we ensure that the team fulfills its tasks? (Some answers: establish realistic priorities and work plans, assign responsibilities only to those who have more time and energy to accomplish the tasks, appoint a person responsible to remind about the tasks and the deadlines);
 - What do we do when we don't manage to accomplish the plans? (Some answers: organize evaluation meetings and analyze results, identify actions that lead to an increase in efficiency and redo the action plans).

Step 5: Adjourning

Do not adjourn the first meeting without giving the group the opportunity to ask questions, and express their opinions about the meeting and its results. Verify whether there are other proposals to include issues on the agenda of the following meeting and establish the date, time and place for the next meeting.

Getting to know oneself and the other members of the team

Each member of the team has his / her own teamwork experience. It is useful for each member to evaluate his / her behavior within the group and be aware of the direction in which he / she wishes to adjust certain behaviors. This leads to increased tolerance of each member towards their partners in the team.

On the next page there is an example of a self-assessment questioner, which may be used during the team forming stage (but not during the first meeting).

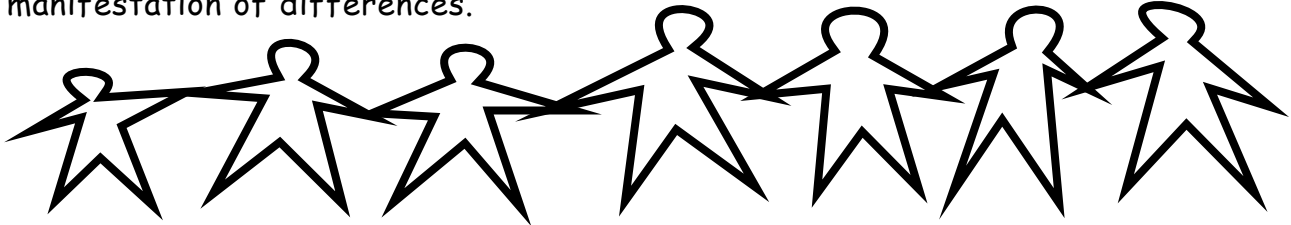
GROUP BEHAVIOR SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONER

This questioner helps you think of your behavior in a group. Indicate on the scale the number that best expresses your behavior. When finished, choose 3 - 4 types of behavior you would most like to change. Indicate by an arrow the direction in which you would like to make this change.

	a. My capacity to listen and understand others							
little	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	great
	b. My capacity to influence the other members of the group							
little	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	great
	c. My tendency to build on the ideas generated by the other members of the group							
little	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	great
	d. My capacity to trust the others							
little	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	great
	e. My desire to discuss my own feelings (emotions) in the group							
little	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	great
	f. My desire to let myself influenced by the others							
little	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	great
	g. My tendency to run the group							
little	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	great
	h. My reactions to the comments on my group behavior							
rejection	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	acceptance
	i. The extent to which I am aware of the others' feelings							
little	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	great
	j. The extent to which I control my reactions							
little	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	great
	k. My reaction in a conflict or disagreement in the group							
intolerance	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	tolerance
	l. My reaction to opposite opinions							
intolerance	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	tolerance

2.NORMING

If during the forming stage there is a certain inhibition and team members avoid strongly expressing their opinions, after the team works together for a while, each member starts trying to find its place in the team, and sub-groups are formed identifying common preferences and options, allowing for increased trust in personal opinions and appetite for noisy manifestation of differences.



The facilitator must intervene using tact, encouraging the expression of opinions and diversity, managing however the observance of rules for efficient communication within the team.

The objectives of the facilitator at this stage are to help the team operate as efficiently as possible:

- Helping the members of the team understand and evaluate the way in which the team works;
- Helping them develop solutions to correct dysfunctionalities and improve performance.

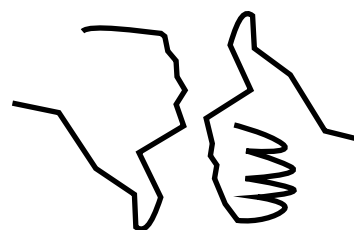
Step 1: Evaluation

The meeting may begin in a skeptical atmosphere, particularly if it is the first time that the members are asked to honestly evaluate the efficiency of the team.

The facilitator must state his / her support and contribute to the creation of a positive atmosphere by making adequate remarks and exhibiting an open attitude.

On the next page there is an evaluation questioner model that may be used as it is or adapted to the specific issues of the group you are working with. Distribute it and ask the members of the team to fill it out individually.

The following questioner will help you evaluate how efficient your team was working together. Read each question and circle the number that you find to correspond to the way in which the team worked during an activity.



E F F E C T I V E N E S S C R I T E R I A

	total disagreement	disagreement	agreement	total agreement
a. Team members understand and agree with the activities established and the proposed results.	1	2	3	4
b. Team members quickly identify and solve conflicts.	1	2	3	4
c. Team members know and accept each other's responsibilities.	1	2	3	4
d. Team members share what they know and believe.	1	2	3	4
e. Team members listen to each other carefully and avoid interrupting each other.	1	2	3	4
f. Team members share the responsibility of maintaining the team focused on efficiently accomplishing their activities.	1	2	3	4
g. Team members discuss and agree on the methods used in formulating decisions.	1	2	3	4
h. All team members participate equally and actively in accomplishment of the team's activity.	1	2	3	4
i. The team uses effective methods to solve the problems and formulate decisions.	1	2	3	4

Step 2: Problem identification

When using this type of questioners it is useful to invite all participants to calculate the average of individual scores for each question, by adding the individual scores and dividing the resulting sum to the number of individual answers.

$$\frac{x + y + z + \dots}{n} = ?$$

Based on these quantitative results, you will be able to further discuss about the following aspects:

- What are the strong aspects of the activities performed by the team?
- What aspects could be improved?

If dealing with a large team, you can form sub-groups to identify possible changes in the work style by asking the question:

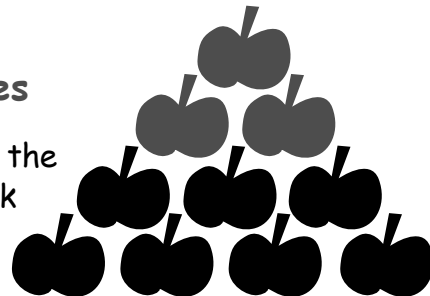
- What could we do differently to be more effective?

Facilitate the presentation of results in the plenary session and list on the flipchart the possible changes:

- What we don't do and should do?
- What we do and should not do?
- What we do and should do differently?

Step 3: Selecting and defining priority issues

Ask each member of the team to select 3 problems on the list and invite them to form 3 groups (optional) to work on the first 3 problems that received the most votes.



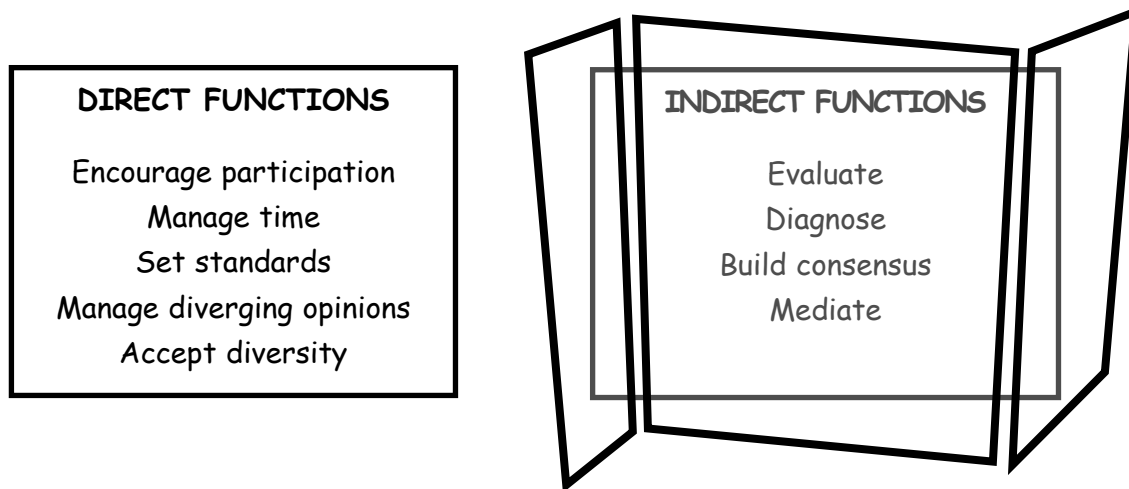
3.PERFORMING

At this stage there is a feeling of belonging to the team, the members are enthusiastic and motivated, there is cooperation and mutual support. At this stage, the role of the facilitator becomes easier, because the team members have understood how they can work efficiently and are able to contribute to the facilitation of teamwork, at times without even realizing it.

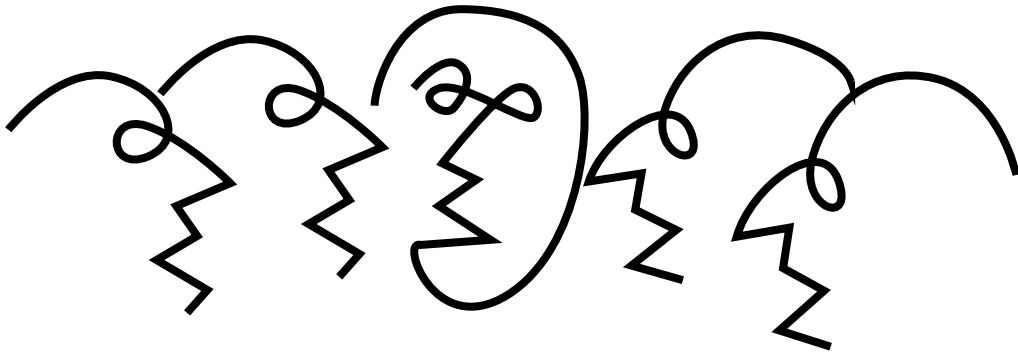
CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EFFICIENT TEAM

- Clear mission (goal, direction, vision, objectives) - assumed by the group;
- Clear responsibilities and roles - delegation and efficient allocation of human, institutional, material and financial resources;
- Orientation toward results and competition - structure, strategy - coordination and coherence / cooperation;
- Competence in subjects or issues and authority and credibility;
- Unity of action and coordination - team spirit and cooperation;
- Quality standards - quality evaluation systems;
- Openness and flexibility.

THE ROLE OF THE FACILITATOR IN TEAM BUILDING



B. COMMUNICATION PROCESS IN A GROUP



In addition to the knowledge and abilities relating to team formation and understanding group dynamics, a facilitator must understand communication and group decision-making processes. We now suggest making a brief review of the important aspects relating to these processes.

We've seen before how a team is formed and developed and what are the characteristics of an efficient team. But teamwork efficiency and the use of potential resources of each team member are influenced by the way in which the team members communicate among themselves.

Group communication facilitation

Let's see what could be the objectives of the facilitator in supporting the communication process!

The team efficient communication model has 4 characteristics:

It is interactive and balanced

The team uses all its resources when all team members express their ideas and opinions openly. All team members must have the opportunity to ask questions, offer information, suggestions and points of view, and make comments on the ideas exposed. Communication must be balanced, and no one should monopolize the discussion.

The objective of the facilitator is to help the team maintain interactive and balanced communication.

It is respectful

A team works well when all team members avoid mean remarks, irony or banter. Communication based on respect does not mean that jokes are not allowed, but that everybody knows that they must listen to the other because each idea is a potential resource for the team.

The facilitator may easily recognize if communication observes the respect requirement: if someone is not listened to, if he / she is interrupted while speaking, his / her opinions and remarks are ignored, or there are indications suggesting that the contribution of a person is not taken into consideration. The facilitator will intervene if he / she observes that discussions focus on stressing mistakes or weaknesses of certain members instead of focusing on the issues to be solved.

It focuses on the issue / subject discussed

Communication becomes inefficient when team members use a language or ideas that are too general and ambiguous to be useful. If the problems discussed are vaguely expressed, team members will not be able to find solutions, and if a proposal is not correctly formulated team members will not be able to evaluate whether they support such proposal or not.

By asking questions, the facilitator must generate and encourage the clarity and specificity of ideas and comments expressed.

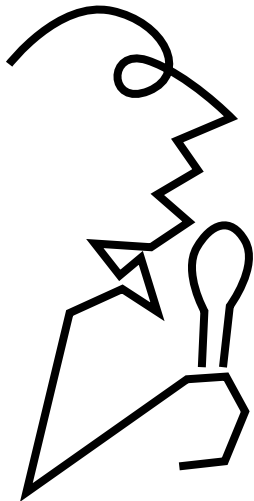
It is relevant

Relevance must be evaluated in connection to the tasks and objectives of the team at a moment in time and refers to the content of the debates, information, data, opinions or ideas expressed. There are many situations where unfavorable remarks refer to unimportant, secondary aspects, or generate discussions on important subjects but which do not make the object of the discussion, distracting the attention of the team.

In both situations, the facilitator is the one to keep the discussions to the point, diplomatically, invoking the ground rules. His / her intervention however, must not block creativity and interaction. Valuable ideas, even when emerging at improper times, may be noted by the facilitator in order to have them discussed in a subsequent meeting, or when the group approached the relevant subject.

Communication facilitation skills and techniques

It is obvious that in order to facilitate the process of group communication the facilitator must be a good communicator himself / herself; in short, a good speaker and a good listener.



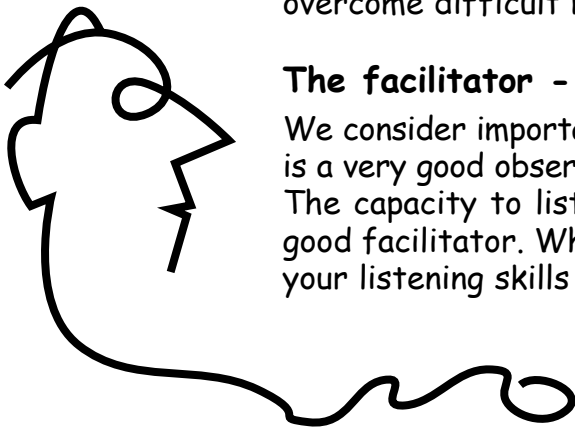
The facilitator - a good speaker

a) **Clarity and ease in expressing ideas:** The capacity to express ideas with clarity and ease, to get the attention of the audience and make oneself listened and understood are skills required also for a good trainer;

b) **Adequate language and vocabulary:** The fact that the he / she addresses a group, that may be heterogeneous, made up of people with different levels and backgrounds, must prompt the facilitator to carefully choose his / her words, use adequate language, so as to make himself / herself understood and liked by all;

c) **A model of expression:** Being the one to intervene in tense moments and help the group avoid escalation to verbal violence, the facilitator must be a model of expression, using a controlled tone of voice, be respectful and understanding and avoid personal attacks;

d) **Self-confidence and trust:** Trying to influence the behavior of the group, the facilitator must be able to help the group build trust in their own forces and in his / her capacity to help the group overcome difficult moments, by self-control.



The facilitator - a good observer and listener

We consider important to underline the fact that a good facilitator is a very good observer of individual and group behavior.

The capacity to listen is however one of the essential skills of a good facilitator. What kind of a listener are you? You can evaluate your listening skills using the following questioner.

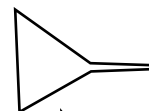
LISTENING SKILLS EVALUATION QUESTIONER

Score:
1 - There is room for improvement
2 - Good
3 - Excellent

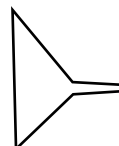
CHARACTERISTICS

SCORE

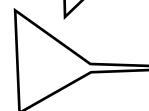
Interested and accessible: I am interested to find out what others know and feel and I am available when others wish to speak to me.



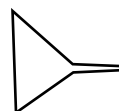
I support others to express themselves: I manage to help others express what they know and feel through non-verbal means (visual contact, smile, nodding) and through questions, so that I can also listen to those who are difficult to follow or have poorly structured ideas.



I rephrase: I am able to accurately rephrase the statements of my interlocutor to prove and check that I understood correctly.



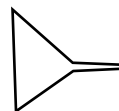
I pay attention: I manage to concentrate on the speaker, without thinking of what I want to say next.



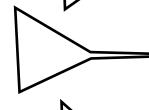
I am patient: I manage to listen without interrupting the speaker by immediately offering other points of view.



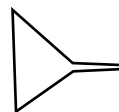
I have self-control: I am able to control my feelings toward the interlocutor, so that they don't influence the way in which I listen.



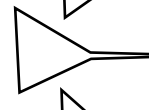
I am open to learning from others: I don't rush to express judgments because I am aware of my own stereotypes and prejudices.



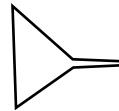
I am tolerant: I respect the right of the others to have a different point of view, and I can listen without my understanding being influenced by what I would like to hear.



I am empathic and understanding: I am capable of understanding the other's feelings and interpret body language, and I express the fact that I understand and accept.



I am not excessively talkative: I manage not to dominate conversations.



Being a good listener, the facilitator retains and understands the content of discussions, may extract the essence (noting key issues on the flipchart), may observe the pros and cons and decide on the speed and direction in which the group goes.

The facilitator must be able to observe and master both the content (what the group discuss - clarity and relevance) and the communication process (how the group discuss - interactivity, respect).

The facilitator has available a few very simple but efficient techniques:



a) Appeal to the rules established by the group

The most important resource of the facilitator in observing the requirements of efficient communication is to appeal to the working rules established by the very group. By appealing to the rules, the facilitator diminishes the risk of being perceived as a person imposing its view, rather than as a person assuming the role of monitoring the behavior and attitudes agreed to by consensus.

b) Ask questions

Asking questions seems to contradict listening. But a facilitator who is a good listener (an **active listener** as it is known in the theory of communication) asks questions to help in:

- Obtaining concrete information and details;
- Clarify confusing ideas;
- Reduce errors in understanding for participants (mutual understanding of messages and clarity of terms);
- Build the relationship between participants, the facilitator reducing and externalizing fears and enabling mutual understanding. The art of the facilitator consists in the ability to combine open-ended questions that are stimulating and entice the participants to talk and think, with questions that generate explanations and additional information to incomplete or vague statements.

Questions may be addressed to the person who expressed an incomplete or unclear idea, but also to the group, to prompt the group to think.

The facilitator must avoid to:

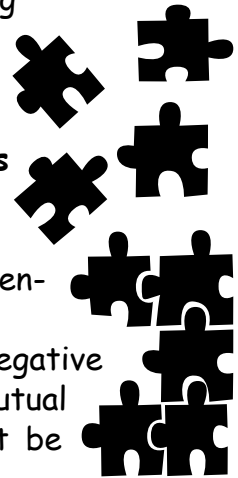
- use interrogatories, trick questions, manipulation or questions that cannot be answered (such as "why") that put participants on the defensive;
- use only close-ended questions.



c) Rephrase

Not all members of the group are able to express their ideas briefly and coherently, and there is a risk of losing useful information or proposals. Focusing on the content of the speaker's message and rephrasing it concisely may add value to an incomplete or unskillfully expressed idea. The intervention must avoid making the speaker uncomfortable. Statements such as **"if I understood correctly, your proposal is to..."** are recommended. Rephrasing combines the communication skills of the facilitator with that of analysis of the issues discussed. Rephrasing by the facilitator helps the members of the team pay attention to all ideas.

Rephrasing may also be used in situations where inflammatory or negative statements have been made that do not observe the principle of mutual respect, having in view that the sense of the statement needs not be changed but only rephrased in a constructive manner.



d) Stop digressions



As stated above, there is a risk that the group be tended to debate issues that are irrelevant or inappropriate for the stage reached by the team. The facilitator can identify the "chatterboxes" who tend to exceed the area of discussions but must intervene by addressing the group. The facilitator must intervene using statements such as **"the aspect raised by Mr. ... is very important and we believe it deserves a special discussion, but don't you think we should go back to what we proposed to do? Do you think we can include this important issue in tomorrow's agenda?"** Ideally getting the discussions back on track is done by questions, by evaluating the opinion of the group, not by imposition!

C. GROUP DECISION MAKING PROCESS

First, what is an efficient decision?

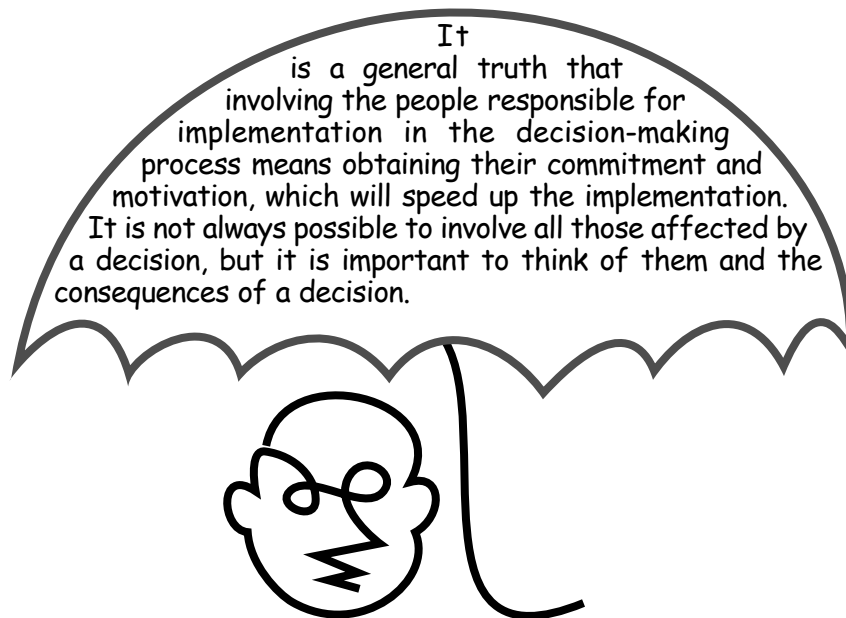
There are two relevant factors in establishing the efficiency of a decision: the quality and acceptability by those implementing it or affected by it.

A QUALITY DECISION may be defined based on a set of characteristics including:

- **Adequacy:** will the decision contribute to solving the problem we are confronted with?
- **Resource availability:** do we have the necessary resources to implement the decision?
- **Time planning:** have we correctly evaluated the time needed to implement the decision?
- **Feasibility:** is the implementation of this decision feasible?

AN EFFICIENT DECISION is accepted by:

- Those who implement it;
- Those who are affected by its consequences.



How are group decision made?

Edgar Schein described in his book "The Consultation Process" the following ways in which a group makes decisions:



a) **Decisions made by lack of response.** This occurs when someone puts forward an idea and nobody reacts to it. By not reacting, the group made the decision not to support the idea or the person who promoted it.



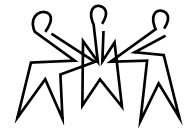
b) **Decisions made by formal or self-appointed authority.** This occurs in groups in which people holding a position of authority (in the community, in the organization) participate and who, by virtue of habit, make decisions in the name of the group without consulting the group members. (Sometimes group members they don't even dare comment).



c) **Decisions made by a minority.** This occurs when the decision making process takes place at the end of a long tiring session, when everybody has lost patience and is unable to react, although few actually support the decision proposed.



d) **Decisions made by a majority.** Obtained by open or secret vote, this is most common in legislative structures. Although it seems efficient and is generally accepted, it often splits the group, and the minority do not commit to the decision, therefore not supporting its implementation.



e) **Decisions made by consensus.** Although it is time consuming, this is the most efficient method because it offers all the opportunity to influence the decision. Consensus means that although there may still be some differences of opinion, they have been listened to, and those who raised them are ready to support the opinion of the group. Part of the consensus is also the desire and openness to implement the decision of the group.



f) **Decisions made by unanimity.** Unanimity means that all group members agree with the action ensuing from the decision of the group. A too "cohesive" group risks to be subject to "groupthinking". People working in a group have the tendency to form a coalition in making decisions and initiating actions none of who agree with. Obtaining agreement becomes the dominating issue and tends to take over the perception on alternatives, inhibiting critical independent thinking.

Building consensus: steps and techniques

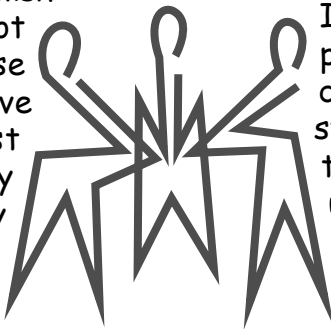
We have included this overview of group decision types to argue in favor of consensus. In the process of group decision-making, the role of the facilitator is to build consensus every time an important decision is at stake, which needs the support of all group members during the implementation of actions.

The members of a team that have become aware that there is a common goal and have decided to accomplish a task, are team members not opponents. They want to use their influence and persuasive powers to obtain the best results. The fact that they are offered the opportunity to influence the decision makes them responsible,

helps them relax and contribute to the quality of the decision. Consensus does not mean absence of conflict but the fact that team members are willing to spend time and energy in order to understand and accept differences.

The process of consensus building is not just a method of making decisions but also a means to gather new information and develop new ideas.

In the consensus building process, the facilitator may decide to go back to previous stages, if he / she finds that there are still unexpressed, unexplained or misunderstood differences.



In principle, the consensus building process includes the following steps:

- Discuss the issue on which a decision is to be made;
- Identify areas of agreement and disagreement. It is useful for these areas to be recorded on flipchart to be seen by all participants;
- Try to reconcile differences by using techniques such as:
 - Worst case scenario - "What is the worst outcome" of each alternative;
 - Pros and cons of each alternative.

In this way, each of the groups with different opinions have the opportunity to express their own point of view as well as what they think about the others' proposal.

- Invite the undecided to express their opinion by a decision made by the majority and record the opinions;
- Gather additional information and continue clarifying alternatives.

The purpose of a consensus decision is to guide the group toward making a decision in respect of which nobody feels excluded and each has the feeling that his / her opinion and interests are represented at least partly.

TECHNIQUES FOR GROUP WORK

In order to help the team work together, communicate and make decisions in a structured manner, the facilitator has available techniques and tools for group work. The most used are Brainstorming and the Nominal Group Technique, described below.

BRAINSTORMING

DEFINITION:

It is a method to stimulate creative thinking based on channeling the energies of a group toward the generation of ideas.

STEPS:

1. State the problem that needs to be solved;
2. Explain the working rules:
 - All ideas are accepted;
 - Each idea is recorded as stated;
 - Discourage the elaboration of already stated ideas;
 - Ideas opposed to the ones already stated are also accepted;
3. Establish a timeframe for idea generation;
4. List the ideas;
5. Allow questions to people stating ideas to help clarify them;
6. The group assesses the ideas and identifies the most promising.

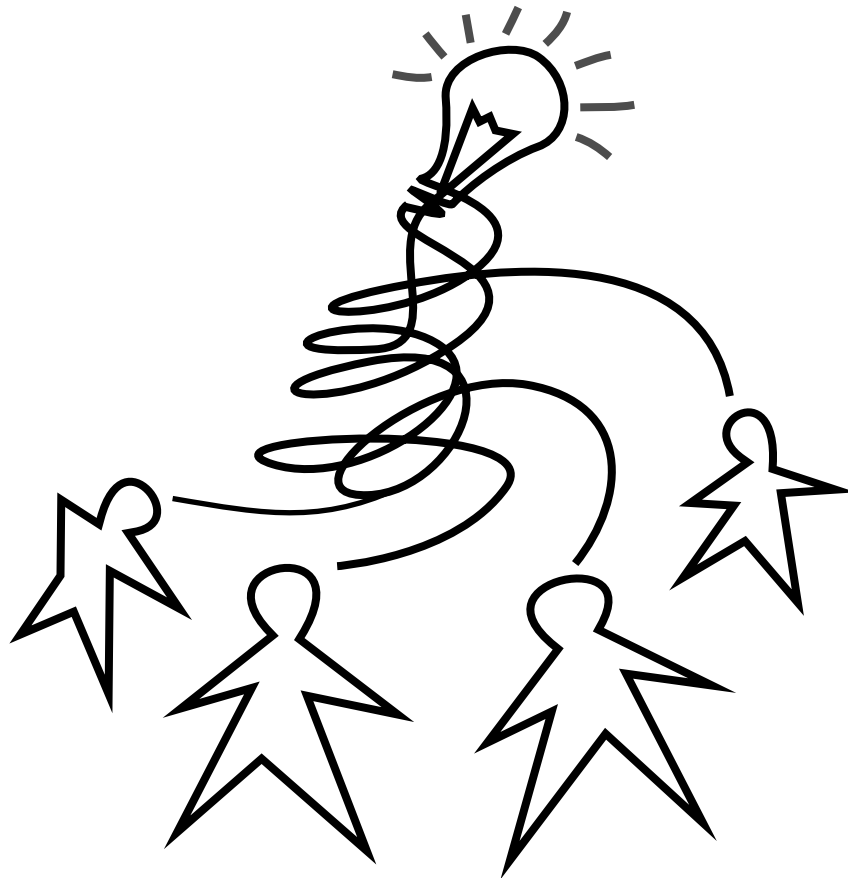
THE NOMINAL GROUP TECHNIQUE

DEFINITION:

Teamwork technique that allows participants work together in a structured manner, without inhibitions or temptations to issue premature judgments.

STEPS:

1. Formulate ideas in writing, individually;
2. Record ideas (one idea from each, in turn);
3. Clarify ideas and structure / rephrase them;
4. Prioritize ideas (preliminary vote);
5. Discuss the results;
6. Final vote.

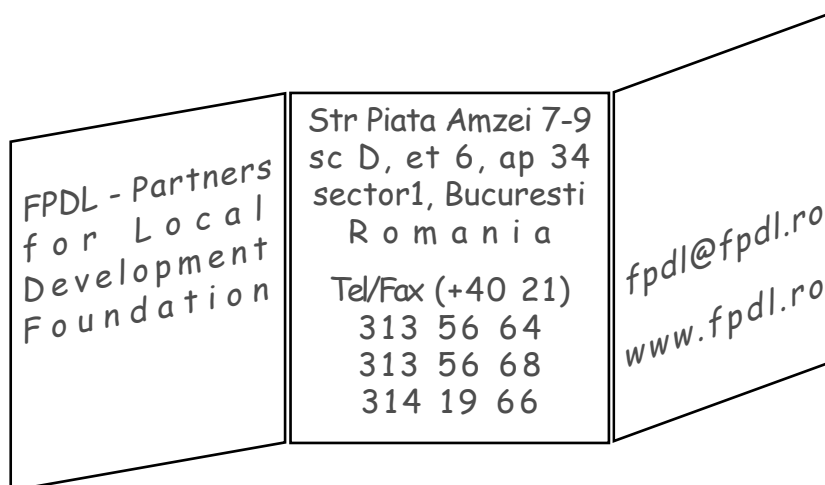


FACILITATION SKILLS DEVELOPMENT TRAINING

Reading this brochure you can improve your knowledge and understanding of basic concepts. However, your facilitation skills will not improve just by reading. You must learn by doing in a skill development training program.

Our experience tells us that you can become a good facilitator through well-designed intensive programs. We encourage you to be critical when selecting the facilitation training desired. The training course must address your needs of learning, and it is designed, adapted and delivered in accordance with the needs of the customer.

If you want more information on our training programs designed to improve your facilitation skills as described in this brochure please contact us at:





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