

Brief Summary of The Skilled Facilitator

by Roger Schwartz

- Group facilitation is a process in which a person whose selection is acceptable to all members of the group, who is substantively neutral and who has no substantive decision making authority diagnoses and intervenes to help a group improve how it identifies and solves problems and makes decisions, to increase the group's effectiveness.
- The Facilitator's main task is to help the group increase effectiveness by improving its process and structure.
- Process refers to how a group works together. It includes how members talk to each other, how they identify and solve problems, how they make decisions and how they handle conflict.
- Structure refers to a stable recurring group process, examples being group membership to group roles.
- To ensure that the facilitator is trusted by all group members and that the group's autonomy is maintained, the facilitator should be acceptable to all members of the group, this person should be by and large neutral, and not have any substantive decision making authority
- The Skilled Facilitator approach is based on a theory of group facilitation that contains a set of core values and principles and a number of techniques and methods derived from core values and principles.
- The key elements of the Skilled Facilitator approach are
 - *The Group Effectiveness model* – which identifies the criteria for effective groups, identifies the elements that contribute to effectiveness and the relationships among them and describe what the elements look like in practice.
 - A clearly defined Facilitative role –
 - to help groups you need a clear definition of your Facilitative role so that you and the groups you are helping have a common understanding about the kinds of behavior that are consistent or inconsistent with your facilitator role.
 - The Skilled Facilitator approach distinguishes between two types of facilitation – Basic and Developmental. In the basic type, the facilitator help a group solve a substantive problem by essentially lending the group his or her process skills. In the developmental type, the facilitator helps a group solve a substantive problem and learn to improve its process at the same time. Here the facilitator also serves as a teacher so the group can eventually become self-facilitating.
 - *Explicit core values* – the Skilled Facilitator approach is based on an explicit set of four core values and on principles that follow them
 - Valid information
 - Free and informed choice
 - Internal commitment
 - Compassion

- *Ground rules for Effective groups* – the ground rules make specific the abstract core values of facilitation and group effectiveness. Examples of the ground rules are to test assumptions and inferences, share all relevant information and agree on what important words mean.
- *The Diagnosis Intervention cycle* – this serves as a guide to the facilitator into effective action. The cycle is structured and simple way to think about what is happening to the group and then to intervene in a way that is consistent with the core values.
- *Low level Inferences* - An inference is a conclusion you reach about something that is unknown to you on the basis of what you observed. By learning to think and intervene using low level inferences, we can increase the accuracy of our diagnosis improve our ability to share our thinking with others and reduce the chance of creating defensive reactions when we do so.
- *Exploring and changing how we think*- The skilled facilitator approach helps you understand the conditions under which you act ineffectively and understand how your own thinking leads you to act ineffectively in ways that you are normally unaware of.it offers tools for increasing your effectiveness especially in situations where you find emotionally difficult.
- *A process for agreeing how to work together* – The Skilled Facilitator approach describes a process for developing an agreement that enables the facilitator and the group to make an informed and free choice about working together.
- *A Systems approach* – The Skilled Facilitator approach recognizes that any action you take affects the group in multiple ways and has short term and long term consequences, some of which may not be obvious. The approach helps you to understand how your behavior as facilitator interfaces with the group's dynamics to increase or decrease the group's effectiveness.

Group Effectiveness Model

- The Group Effectiveness Model is like a special pair of glasses to enable you to see and understand what is determining the group's effectiveness.
- The Group Effectiveness Model contains a work group, the criteria for an effective group, the factors and elements that interact to create an effective group.
- A work group is a set of people with specific interdependent roles who are collectively responsible for producing some output (service, product or decision) that can be assessed and who manage their relationships with those outside the group.
- An Effective work group meets three Criteria – Performance, Process and Personal
 - *Performance* – the services that the group delivers or the products It makes meet or exceed the performance standards of the people who receive it, use it or review it
 - *Process* – the processes and structures used to carry out the work maintain and preferably enhance the ability of members to work together or subsequent group tasks
 - *Personal* – the group experience contributes to the growth and well-being of its members.

- Three factors contribute to group effectiveness – Group Process, Group Structure and Group Context.
- Facilitators intervene primarily through a group’s process and structure enabling the group to examine and change its process, structure and group context.
- **Group Process**
 - Process refers to how things are done, rather what is done
 - Problem solving
 - A problem is simply a gap between what is desired and what exists.
 - Problem solving is the systematic approach a group uses to identify a problem, establish criteria for evaluating potential solutions, collect relevant information, identify the causes of the problem, evaluate and select a solution and implement and evaluate it. Members often being to solve the problem by suggest solutions before agreeing on the problems or its causes.
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 - Decision making
 - Decision making involves reaching a conclusion or making a choice
 - The core values of facilitation state that the group includes people who have relevant information about the problem and its causes, it solutions and potential effects.
 - Conflict management
 - An effective group considers conflict a natural part of group life, if it is managed well, conflict improves members’ ability to accomplish their task, work together and contribute to personal growth.
 - Members of an effective group openly confront each other, believing that each person is strong enough to receive negative feedback directly.
 - Communication
 - An effective group communicates in a way that creates valid information
 - To generate valid information members, share not just their opinions and conclusions but also how they arrived at them.
 - Members openly express disagreement with other members regardless of difference in position and status.
 - An effective group deals with undiscussable issues – important issues that members often believe cannot be discussed openly without negative consequences.
 - Boundary management
 - An effective work group manages its relationships with the organization by simultaneously differentiating itself and coordinating with the organization.
 - Members can articulate the group’s task and what they are responsible for accomplishing, so that they do not take on tasks unrelated to their purpose and outside the group’s expertise.
- **Group Structure**

- Group structure refers to the relatively stable characteristics of a group including vision and mission, membership, roles each member fills, time members have available, shared values and beliefs and norms
- Clear mission and Shared vision
 - A vision is a mental picture of the future that a group seeks to create.
 - A group's mission answers the question "Why do we exist?"
- Effective group culture
 - Group culture is the set of fundamental values and beliefs that members of a group share and that guide their behavior.
 - In an effective group, members can articulate the group's core values and beliefs, and they take actions and make decisions that are consistent with the shared values and beliefs
- Clear goals
 - Clear goals enable a group to measure its progress towards achieving them – an absence of clear goals could potentially lead to conflicts.
- Motivating group task
 - Group members must be interdependent with each other in accomplishing the task and share collective responsibility for the group's output.
 - Group task gives members significant autonomy over how they accomplish the task so that they feel ownership of their work.
- Appropriate membership
 - An effective group has a membership that is carefully selected according to several criteria and has an appropriate mix of knowledge and skills to successfully complete the task.
- Clearly defined roles including leadership
 - In an effective group, members clearly understand what role each member plays and what behavior people expect in each role.
- Group norms
 - The ground rules for effective groups are a set of group norms that are based on the core values and beliefs of the Skilled Facilitator approach.
- **Group Context**
 - Group context includes aspects of the larger organization that influence the group's effectiveness but that the group usually does not control.
 - Understanding the group context helps a facilitator identify how the larger organization is likely to help or hinder a group's efforts to improve effectiveness.
 - A clear mission and shared vision
 - An effective group understands and shares the organization's mission and vision and makes group decisions consistent with them
 - Supportive organizational culture
 - Organizational culture refers to the set of values and beliefs that members of an organization generally share and that guide their behavior.
 - A group is more effective if the organizational culture is supportive
 - Rewards consistent with Group objectives and design

- To create an effective group, the organization rewards behavior that is consistent with the group's objectives - reward the group as a group and not individually
- Information, including feedback about performance
 - An effective group has access to the valid and relevant information needed to perform the work, including the constraints within which the members work.
- Training and Consultation
 - Effective groups have access to training and consultation to help them increase their knowledge, develop their skills and solve problems necessary to perform tasks
- Technology and material resources
 - Technology is the means by which a group converts or transforms the raw materials into a product or service
 - Material resources include all the tools, supplies and raw materials needed for the finished product or service.
- Physical environment that fits the group's needs
 - Physical environment refers to where the members are located and how their physical space is designed.
 - An effective group has a workspace that is designed to meet the demands of work

The Facilitator Role

- A facilitator is substantively neutral third party acceptable to all members of the group, who has no substantive decision making authority
- The facilitator's purpose is to help a group increase its effectiveness by diagnosing and intervening largely on group process and structure.
- Substantively neutral - this requires the facilitator listening to member's views and remaining curious about how their reasoning differs from others so that you can help the group engage in productive conversation
- Third party – A Facilitator needs to be a third party because it is difficult to act neutrally in your own group
- Process Expert – A facilitator needs to be a process expert and advocate. As a process expert, you advocate for processes, structures, and behaviors necessary for effective facilitation.

Core values of Skilled Facilitator approach

- The Skilled Facilitator approach is based on four values – valid information, free and informed choice, internal commitment to those choices and compassion.
- Valid information
 - People share all relevant information – in a way that others understand it and validate it
 - People constantly seek new information to determine whether past decisions should be changed on the basis of new valid information.
- Free and informed choice
 - People define their own objectives and methods for achieving them

- Choices are based on valid information and are not coerced or manipulated
- Internal commitment
 - People feel personally responsible for their own choices, they own their decisions
 - Commitment to action is intrinsic, rather than based on reward or punishment
- Compassion
 - People are concerned for others and their own good, and appreciate others and their own suffering
 - If one acts out of compassion, one is able to move beyond defensiveness and be vulnerable.

Mutual Learning Model

- Mutual Learning model is the theory in use that enables you as a facilitator and the group to enhance your effectiveness even in difficult situations.
- The Skilled Facilitator approach is based on Mutual Learning model
- The core values of the Mutual Learning model - are Valid information, Free and informed choice, internal commitment to the choice and compassion.
- The Assumptions of the Mutual Learning model are
 - I have some information, others have other information
 - Each of us may see things the others do not
 - Differences are opportunities for learning
 - People are trying to act with integrity given their situation

Ground rules for effective groups

- These ground rules are like dance steps, each one is part of the foundation, but the power and elegance you see usually results from combining the steps to create movement with purpose.
 - Test assumptions and inferences – when you assume something, you take for granted that it is true without verifying it. When you infer something, you draw a conclusion about what you do not know on the basis of things you do know.
 - Share all relevant information – sharing relevant information ensures that members have a common base of information on which to make an informed choice and generate commitment.
 - Use specific examples and agree on important words - Unlike a general statement, a specific example yields valid information because it enables other members to determine independently whether the example is valid. They help people to understand what important words mean.
 - Explain your reasoning and intent – explaining to others what leads you to make a comment or ask a question or take an action. This gives us opportunities to learn where others have differing views and where you may have missed something.
 - Focus on interests not positions – Interests are the needs and desires that people have in regard to a given situation. One way of having members

focusing on interests is to have each of them list a criteria that must be met for that member to accept a solution.

- Combine advocacy and inquiry – Combining advocacy and inquiry means expressing your point of view which includes sharing your reasoning and intent and then inviting others to inquire into your comments. This creates conditions for learning.
- Jointly design the approach – this is about advocating your point of view about how to proceed, inquiring about how others may see it differently, jointly crafting a way to proceed that takes into account group member's interests – in short this enables the group to make an informed free choice about how to proceed.
- Discuss undiscussables – Undiscussable issues are those that are relevant to the group's task but that group members believe they cannot discuss openly without some negative consequences. Members can explore their feelings or seek permission about discussing such an issue without actually discussing the content.
- Use a decision-making rule that generates the commitment needed – the more the group members are able to make an informed free choice, the more they are likely to be internally committed to the decision. Group decision making process can be Consultative, Democratic, Consensus or Delegative.
- Consequences
 - Increased understanding, reduced conflict and defensiveness
 - Increased trust
 - Fewer self-fulfilling, self-sealing processes
 - Increased learning
 - Increased effectiveness
 - Increased quality of work life

Diagnosis Intervention Cycle

- The Diagnosis Intervention Cycle is a structured way to diagnose behavior and then intervene on it.
- The cycle has 6 steps – three for diagnosis and three for intervention
- Step One – Observing Behavior
 - Directly observable behavior comprises the verbatim words that people speak and the non-verbal actions they make.
- Step Two – Inferring meaning
 - You infer some meaning from the behavior.
 - An inference is a conclusion you reach about something unknown, on the basis of some things that are known to you. E.g. Rolling one's eyes might mean frustration.
- Step Three – deciding whether, how and why to intervene
 - Decide whether the inferences made in Step Two warrant an intervention or remain silent.
- Step Four – Describing the behavior

- You publicly describe the behavior that you observed that that led you to intervene. Then you ask the group member / members whether they observed the behavior differently.
- Step Five – Sharing your inferences
 - You share the inference that you privately made in Step Two and test with the group member/s whether they have a different inference.
- Step Six – Helping group members change their behavior
 - You help group members decide whether and how to change their behavior to be more effective.
