



*Getting you
started..*

Basics of Facilitation

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Basics of Facilitation



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1 Introduction

This short (and we mean short) e-book has been provided to you in good faith as our way of saying ‘well-done’ and ‘thanks’ for completing the *ARID* online facilitation self-assessment ©.

‘Getting you started’ aims to give you a taste of some of the key aspects of facilitation, which have been road-tested by the *ARID* Group Training team. We’ve based these notes on one-section of the *ARID* Crash Course in Facilitation.

In some cases this e-book will raise as many questions as it does provide answers. Obviously there’s a lot more to the program and facilitation than what you’ll read here, but it’s a start!

1.1 Developing your facilitation skills

As you & many of your colleagues identified in the *ARID* online facilitation self-assessment ©, practise and feedback are two critical elements to developing your facilitation skills. We strongly encourage you to seek both!

Also keep in touch with what’s happening in facilitation by maintaining networks with your peers and of course, keeping an eye out for the *ARID* newsletter.

A useful email discussion group is through the Australasian Facilitators Network (AFN). You can subscribe at <http://lists.scu.edu.au/mailman/listinfo/afn-l>. The AFN also has the most awesome & valuable facilitation conferences, held in late November. Check out <http://www.facilitators.net.au> for more information.

If you’d like to know more about the Crash Course in Facilitation, please feel free to get in touch (www.arid.com.au or andrew@arid.com.au or call Andrew on 0429 470 285). The courses usually fill quickly and as past participants have told us, provide immense value and practical, hands-on tips.

We’re sure you’ll get some value from using this resource and feel free to contact us if you have any queries or clarifications.

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2 The *ARID* Basics of Facilitation

Facilitation is the partly the process of getting answers. Answers which will help people learn, make change, make decisions and set goals. Sam Kaner (2007) suggests that the facilitator's role is to 'support everyone to do their best thinking.'

To be a good facilitator, you have to be good at asking questions and NOT providing answers.

Kaner believes that the facilitator has four key functions:

- To encourage full participation
- To promote mutual understanding
- To foster inclusive solutions
- To cultivate shared responsibility

i) Encourage full participation

- Make sure everyone has the opportunity to participate & be heard
- Develop a process that removes criticism of ideas
- Allow people to express themselves, even if they don't make complete sense to everyone

ii) Promote mutual understanding

- Help participants consider & value each others point of view
- Maintain a neutral stance on the topic
- Listen with the aim to understand

iii) Foster inclusive solutions

- Help groups move away from 'win-lose' scenarios
- Get people to consider each others interests rather than positions
- Help groups to develop solutions that draw on the groups collective experience & ideas

iv) Cultivate shared responsibility

- Help the group to move away from leaving everything to the 'usual suspects'
- Encourage all involved in the decision-making to be part of implementation of the solution

Facilitators also encourage communication to build understanding and enable people to learn from each other.

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Donna Ching (1998) and John Barkai (2003) developed some more pragmatic descriptions of the facilitator's roles. They suggested that the role of the facilitator is to keep the group focused by:

- being clear about the group's purpose
- being clear about the desired outcomes
- reviewing the proposed agenda
- developing and enforcing ground rules
- clarifying expectations at the beginning
- finding agreement on a content focus
- finding agreement on a process focus
- reminding participants about content and process
- providing positive reinforcement
- keeping the group on track
- making process suggestions

Create a safe environment by:

- protecting participants from personal attack
- ensuring everyone participates
- dealing with difficult people

Close effectively by:

- developing "next steps"
- getting commitments for follow-through
- summarizing accomplishments
- evaluating the meeting

Ching and Barkai appear to have a focus on process (their facilitation context is mostly related to facilitation of meetings). Kaner's appears to have a stronger focus on the philosophies and values that a facilitator should hold in relation to how they work with a group.

The 'golden rules' below reflect both approaches, combined with lessons (and I mean hard-earned lessons) of facilitating a range of groups in a range of sectors over the last 15 or so years.

2.1 The golden rules (in summary)

Be prepared.

Always go into a workshop with a defined, discussed and documented plan of attack. Be clear on the outcomes required. Check that the venue, tools and equipment are appropriate.

Know your role.

Within the workshop your role is to ask a series of planned, constructive questions that tap into the knowledge, skills and experience of the group. Remember to give them the space to think. Help maintain their focus on the immediate task or issue.

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Involve people.

Design and revise the process to ensure everyone has the opportunity for input.

Work with the people.

The people there are the right people. Set the scene to enable people to be relatively comfortable in working with you and with each other. Find out people's expectations.

Be flexible.

Your plan may not always work. Even with the most thorough planning, it's rare for a workshop to go completely to plan. Be ready for changes required by participants. Be flexible enough to change the process if required. Regularly check in with the group if they are ready to move on.

Focus.

Your role is also to keep the process moving. Check that people are answering the questions being asked. If not, find out why. Give them space & encouragement where needed. Be aware of when it's just time to move on – if needed you can revisit sticking points later. Document the answers.

3 Planning and Facilitating Meetings

Kaner (2007) believes that there are three components that need to be used as the building blocks for successful meetings. These are:

- Topics
- Outcomes
- Processes

In Kaner's model, each topic is viewed as a separate segment of the meeting. The desired outcome for that segment can be viewed as a goal for that segment of the meeting.

Kaner's model also outlines seven types of meeting goals

1. Share information
2. Advance the thinking
3. Improve communication
4. Build community
5. Build capacity
6. Make decisions
7. Obtain input

My experience of team meetings has been focused more on obtaining input in making decisions. These are the areas that we will focus on here. Whilst the other goals can be achieved either directly or indirectly, I see them more related to a workshop-type process.

Processes refer to the activities & exercises that you will get participants to undertake in order to achieve the outcomes.

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3.1 Planning phase

A plan needs to be made for each of the building blocks above in order for you to achieve success in your team meetings.

Without sounding too patronising, I think we also need to ensure that a meeting is actually needed. I've been in far too many weekly or team meetings which exist based on tradition or habit rather than real need.

When planning a meeting ask yourself these questions:

- Why? Identify exactly why a meeting is needed
- Which? Identify the topics to be discussed
- What? Be clear on objectives or outcomes (ie what you want from the meeting)

Following this, there are two more key planning steps to be resolved. They are 'inform' and 'structure'.

Inform

- Identify who needs to be involved in the decision
- Make sure they know exactly what is to be discussed & why
- Identify the information the needs to be supplied beforehand
- Ensure everyone comes armed with the information needed to make a decision

Structure

- Structure the sequence of topics in a logical order (Strategic>Tactical>Operational)
- Allocate time for each topic based on its importance
- Develop focus questions

Strategic issues

These normally relate to the longer-term future of the group and should be the main focus of the meeting. They should be given significant discussion time – preferably at the start of the meeting. Allow time for group input, discussion of alternatives and recommendations.

Tactical issues

This involve medium-term impacts and should require less discussion time. They can also be delegated to subcommittees for their recommendation.

Operational issues

These normally relate to daily business functions and should be handled towards the end of a meeting. Reporting on these prior to the meeting will also help free up time for questions.

Focus questions

Articulate clearly what you need from the group. It may help to write up (for yourself and for the group) a focus question for each topic or decision to be made (see Section 6.2).

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3.2 Meeting facilitation – a scenario

Imagine that you're managing the oncology ward of a major hospital that deals with a wide-range of age-groups. Many of the patients come from non-English speaking backgrounds.

All are feeling varying levels of anxiety & uncertainty. Most really don't know what to expect from their treatment. There have been complaints from patient's families that they're being given inappropriate treatment.

You organise a staff meeting to try to address this. The meeting topic would thus be: "How can we improve patient's understanding of their treatment?"

Some of the focus questions that you could use could include:

- What options do we have?
- What are the impacts for the ward?
- How should we move forward?
- What are the recommendations of this group?

This could be a serious issue for the hospital and should be treated as a strategic issue within any meeting. It therefore should be discussed at the commencement of any team meeting with appropriate information provided beforehand.

As a facilitator of the meeting it is your role to:

- Provide the context
- Clarify the issue

It should be the group's (team's) role to:

- Identify the impacts
- Identify options (using either a brainstorm and/or card-sort process)
- Discuss options (Could use SWOT analysis, circle of control or six thinking hats)
- Identify appropriate actions & timeframes

In closing off the topic discussion as a facilitator you should:

- Summarise & record
- Clarify the actions & timeframes
- Identify responsibilities
- Question to ensure clear understanding & commitment

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4 A basic workshop overview

4.1 Clarifying proposed workshop outcomes

Be clear on why the workshop is being held. Clarify the key objectives & outcomes, especially if you're coming into a group as an external facilitator. In this context, outcomes are essentially the endpoints that the group will reach.

Some examples of workshop outcomes include:

- 'Prioritisation of sections for upgrade along the Brookton Highway'
- 'Agreed research priorities for air quality in WA'
- 'Development of a community engagement plan for the new regional strategy'.

Remember, articulation of outcomes is not about manipulating the result, it's about designing a process to reach a defined endpoint.

! Tip re Wording

• I generally stick to using the terminology of workshop 'objectives' rather than 'outcomes'. Some people misinterpret 'outcomes' to be preconceived & thus question whether their own input is valid

4.2 Write out your plan

A workshop plan should include the focus questions that you plan to ask. This is vital. The focus question/s for each section is your anchor – it stops you from drifting into rough waters. If people start getting off track, waffling or holding side conversations, refer them back to the focus question.

In your plan, identify the timing of the sessions and the materials required. Mentally rehearse how you will run the workshop in your mind.

Get some support. Have a scribe for your first few workshops, or a colleague to co-facilitate or provide feedback to you.

4.3 Get equipped

Get a facilitation 'kit' together that includes:

- Butchers paper
- Textas
- Blotack
- Flip chart or whiteboard
- Bulldog clips or mega strong magnetic clips
- A watch or clock
- Minties
- A5 scrap paper and/or post-it notes
- Spare pens
- Name tags

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4.4 Set up

Following is a basic checklist for setting up

- Seating is set up so that all can see the whiteboard or flip chart. Either U-shape; semi-circle or on individual tables
- Have people facing away from the window
- Visualise or practise how you'll use the whiteboards & any visual aids
- Test that the electronic whiteboard works
- Test your textas – separate the permanent markers
- Have some cold water and/or tea & coffee available
- Check where the toilets, air con and exits are

4.5 Starting the workshop

The first session of a workshop is all about setting the scene and making people feel reasonably comfortable with what lays ahead. There are still a lot of people who feel uneasy about being 'facilitated'. Being open and clear about the process, what you intend to do and why, will help people to focus on the content of the workshop rather than the facilitation processes being used.

In a nutshell - be upfront and keep it simple – not many people will complain about that!

The most important part of starting any workshop is to ensure that participants gain an understanding of workshop aims.

The basics are

- Introduce yourself and your role, including who you represent
- Thank participants for investing their time, effort & passion in the workshop
- Provide a brief outline of why the workshop is being held (background)
- Provide a brief outline of what the workshop is planned to achieve (objectives or outcomes)
- Indicate how long the process/workshop will take
- Talk briefly about how you intend to run proceedings (ie brainstorming, goal setting, prioritisation etc)
- Emphasise that your role is to lead the process and ask the questions
- Emphasise that you'll be drawing on the skills and experience of those in the room to develop agreed solutions

! Things to remember

- Breathe – you've got to breathe. Breathe in- breathe out. It's easy.
- Every day above ground is a good day
- Fear & nervousness is excitement waiting to get out
- Get through this part and your confidence will continue to grow

! Things to check

- Everyone is clear on why the workshop is being held
- Everyone is clear on what can be achieved

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? Questions to ask

- Are there any questions?
- Is everyone clear on what we're trying to achieve?
- Are we ready to move on

X Don't

- Ask if people are happy (not everyone likes workshops)

4.6 Introductions

People like to know who they're working with. A workshop situation is no different. Introductions can help people to find out what skills and experience lie within the group, as well as put a name to a face.

Some people like to keep their private lives separate from work. As facilitators, we have to respect that. Some people are plain shy and we have to be aware of this.

Doing some homework beforehand will help you to decide what is the most appropriate way to conduct introductions. There is a range of ways for people to introduce themselves, or each other.

4.7 Ground rules

If you envisage some challenges in managing a group, it's a new group or you have not worked with them before, then it may be worthwhile setting some ground rules or a group contract.

This process encourages them to set their own standards for what is expected of each other. In an ideal world, once people have agreed to the ground rules the group should 'self-govern'.

Through agreement with the ground-rules, the group will often pull any offenders into line. If they don't, a gentle reminder about the agreed ground rules can be a great tool for keeping the workshop process moving.

4.8 Expectations

Getting people to articulate their expectations of the workshop helps to reiterate the workshop aims. It can also help to clear the air in terms of what can be realistically expected by participants. Hearing first-hand what people's expectations are will also help you in making any necessary changes to the workshop program as you progress

The basics

- Context – ask, “What are your aims for the workshop” or “what do you want to get out of this session?”
- Write the responses up on a flipchart that can be referred to later or at the end of the workshop as a means of evaluating progress

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4.9 Getting focused

Reiterate the workshop aims so that people are clear on the issues that you are tackling.

For each session that you are running, write up the focus question and read it out. Define any terminology within the focus question.

Clearly explain what you are requiring from participants.

4.10 Gathering ideas

If working with a small group (12 or less) you can get ideas from all people fairly simply.

The basics

- Get people to individually write down 2-3 responses to the focus question
- Give people time to respond – the analytics and amiables may need a bit longer. Try to get use to the ‘silent gap’, whilst people are thinking of how to best express their idea
- Go around the group once and get each person’s ‘number 1’ choice (or other choices if the number 1 has already been mentioned)
- Get remaining responses from the group as a whole. Ask “any other ideas?” or “anyone else?” whilst looking in the general direction of those who are not contributing
- Get clarification if you don’t understand what they mean. Say the idea back to them* if you need to
- Use eye contact, smile, nod and thank people for their ideas
- Use peoples names as much as possible

! Things to be aware of

If you are concerned about the level of literacy in the group, give people the option to pair up for the above process.

Encourage participants to link their ideas to the focus question being discussed.

Remember to restate the focus question at regular intervals.

- Try not to worry too much if some ideas are not fully formed or perfectly articulated, the important thing is to encourage thinking & creativity (this may not always be a given in some groups)
- Remember, in a brainstorming session, the ideas are simply that – ideas. They’ll be filtered or prioritised later. They’re not for debate early in the process – they’re used to prompt thought and to move the group forward
- Hold on to your own opinions.
- Provide a prompt or ask a question where appropriate

*Sam Kaner (pg 44-50) provides a good overview of active listening techniques that are very applicable for facilitators

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4.11 Recording ideas.

With your process already planned and running, make sure you capture people's ideas accurately and concisely. Having a scribe is a great way to do this, especially if you are developing your experience, working with a large group, dealing with complex issues or have a limited timeframe for the workshop.

When recording ideas:

- Try to use the same words as the participant
- Always aim to get single ideas from participants
- If the participant uses more than 2 sentences to express their idea, ask them to clarify or provide a suggestion on how to paraphrase their idea. Use questions like “so what you're saying is...?” or “Do you mean....?”

4.12 Moving between different sections of the workshop

Be sure to let people know where you all are in the process. Briefly summarise each section before you move on.

Then briefly explain what you are about to cover and why. This will allay any concerns that some may have about the process. It can sometimes result in the group identifying that specific sections of the workshop are not necessarily needed or could be used later.

If you're ahead of time or have just covered a particularly energy-sapping session, look for the opportunity to have a short break to re-energise the group.

4.13 Closing the workshop

Do a brief summary of the process covered and some of the results from each section. Identify the key outcomes and describe how the information generated will be used in the future. Thank all participants for their commitment and participation.

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5 Facilitation resources

Remember, if you'd like to know more about the Crash Course in Facilitation, please feel free to get in touch (www.arid.com.au or andrew@arid.com.au or call Andrew on 0429 470 285).

The following reference guides have helped us immensely in further developing our facilitation skills and are well worth getting your hands on. And that's what they focus on – 'hands-on!'

Dick, R. (1991). *Helping groups to be effective*. Interchange, Chapel Hill, Qld.
ISBN 1 875260 09 9

Hogan, C. (2006) *Practical facilitation: A toolkit of techniques*, Kogan Page, London, UK.
ISBN 0 7494 3827 4

Kaner, S. with Lind, L., Toldi, C., Fisk, S. & Berger, D. (2007) *Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making*, John Wiley & sons, San Francisco, USA.
ISBN 13 987 0 7879 8266 9

Keating, C.D.M (2003). *Facilitation toolkit. A practical guide for working more effectively with people and groups*. Department of Environment. (Available in downloadable PDF from www.dec.wa.gov.au Use the Department of Environment link. Then use the Working with the community & Community involvement links) ISBN 1 920 687 17 3.

