

Forum facilitation workshop September 2011

an outline

Good facilitation begins before the meeting

*heating, greeting, seating, eating

- introduce and welcome new folk
- circle rather than rows
- get all documents out to people in plenty of time
- invitations, reminders, transport
- familiarise self with agenda & work out best process for “tricky” items
- set ground rules at beginning of meeting

For some of us knowing and seeing that these things are in place is more important than for others

Where are you on the continuum? (which can be a metaphor or reality!):

I prefer to zoom down the motorway to my destination.

I like to meander down a country road and enjoy the scenery

Where would you place key people in the meeting? Are they/ you process or outcome oriented ?

How can you shape the meeting to meet both sorts of needs?

What is the role of the facilitator?

* to devise a process to meet desired outcomes (not decision outcomes but process ones)

the more complex or conflicted a meeting is likely to be, the more important it becomes that the facilitator does not get involved in expressing her/his viewpoint. If it is important that you have input into the decision you should **find someone else to facilitate** ie choose which hat you will wear and work out strategies to keep to it on!

- to reduce anxiety, or, expressed more positively, build trust
- model a “non anxious presence” (think of a midwife!)
- be open to suprising/ challenging ideas and processes (not defensive)
- to ensure everyone has a chance to express an opinion and be heard
- when necessary to remind the meeting of its core values and agreed purpose
- keep the conversation on track
- keep an eye on the time
- bring the meeting to a point where they can make a sound decision

Focus:

It helps to try to focus the meeting **on exploration rather than debate** curiosity rather than judgment at least at first – don't move too quickly to the vote or decision.

I think it is always helpful to focus **on the issue that has brought us together**, the values and needs and wisdom of the group and specifically **on relating to each other rather than defending our own position.**

When there are firmly held positions:

We often come to meetings with strong positions on things, be they moral stands or ones from my own experience or knowledge. It can be very hard to really hear the other person. Particularly where there are strong feelings.

- make room for feelings to be expressed
- consider buzz groups
- consider groups of like minded people where they can talk safely and openly **but** then ask them to discuss “what do I not agree with, worry about our perspective, what I admire about the other sides' position”
- always come back into plenary

The more a person contributes and is heard the more they will own decisions made ie things are more likely to get done after the meeting!

- dealing with dominant voices

“the order of speakers in any deliberation can significantly shape the direction of a discussion”

- creating a safe climate for all to speak
- brainstorming and prioretising (sticker voting)
- round robins with a pass option
- listening
- checking out what you think you've heard
- summarising what's been said and where you think we've got to
the matchstick game

avoiding the “car park” meeting

When things get stuck

reframing

“The role of reframing is to break the symptomatic perpetual frame so as to reveal new opportunities and bring about a neutral or positive perception.... And in doing so alter the emotional context.”

- challenge “we always”, or “we never” or “lots of people think” statements
- invite all brainstorm contributions to be positively worded

“I hate modern songs” becomes “I like traditional hymns”

When there is conflict that is becoming unhelpfully focused on beating the other person or group, the facilitator can call on all parties to establish or refocus on “an agreed **desired outcome**”

Highlight the points of agreement then work on differences

If whole decision appears too big **deal with one section at a time**

Use the 'plus, minus, interesting' technique

If there is no clear agreement

What for you, in your setting, constitutes a clear agreement?

What are the pitfalls of, say, a 60/40 “agreement”?

Ask those holding a different but minority opinion:

- * Do you feel you have been heard?
- * Are you prepared to allow this to become our decision?
- * What would you need to happen to allow the group to move on to the next topic?
- * What further information would help you
- * Is there a way we could re shape the suggested decision which would enable you to support it?

If still stuck:

decide what work needs to be done and who will do it.

eg more information, interest groups meeting together, outside facilitation/ conflict resolution, etc.

Maybe invite the minority group to “caucus and report back while we *all* have a cuppa.

Remember the key is an appropriate decision in the future not an expeditious one

Facilitating change:

includes:

Dealing with the legacy of the past

Seeing the present clearly and realistically

Enabling others to vision, and catch the vision of, the future

Human reactions to change often go through similar stages (*like eg. grief*)

denial

blaming others

blaming self,

acceptance of the new situation,

creative problem solving for the future

Sometimes people pass through these stages very quickly, but they can also remain stuck for a long time.

"People resist change" is often said but seldom true!

What is true is that **people resist *imposed* change.**

Two main approaches to creating change:

Most popular is the **problem-focused approach:**

Identifies what is wrong with the current situation,
analyses the current situation, explores possible solutions.

All too often this does not solve the problem but actually sustains it:

energy and attention get focused on what isn't working - the problem has to be maintained so that the focus on solving it can continue!

A rarer approach to creating change is to **be solution-focused.**

Instead of looking at what isn't working, we search out examples of where the change has already happened.

If we can't find any, we imagine instances of the changes we want to have happen.

We focus on these, encourage people to enact them, promote their occurrence, value and appreciate the behaviours we want and so on.

In practical terms we shift from prohibition - "Don't do that"

to encouragement - "Do more of this".

Good facilitation continues after the meeting:

Ensure people know what they are to do

"don't give change jobs to gatekeepers"

seek feedback and gauge where folk really are as they leave
feedback on process as well as decisions

good minutes sent out quickly

sharing information with another group –

eg taking a parish council decision to a congregational meeting .

each new group is a new dynamic – be prepared to do a lot of the "leg work" again.