Facilitative Leadership


Facilitate:
- To make easy or easier
- To lighten the work of, assist, help
- To increase the ease of performance of any action

*Webster’s New World Dictionary*

Facilitators help teams achieve their goals through the use of team tools, disciplined problem-solving techniques, and continuous improvement methods. They apply good meeting management principles, give and receive feedback, and learn to make adjustments.

A facilitator focuses on team upkeep. They guide, teach, and encourage the team. Ultimately, facilitators should work themselves out of a job, where the group no longer needs their assistance. A facilitator’s role is to help the group with process, not to try to influence the content and final product of the group.
### Key Roles & Tasks of Facilitator

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<th>Key Roles of Facilitator</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
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<td><strong>Coach the Team Leader</strong>&lt;br&gt;coaching the team leader in the process of accomplishing the meeting objectives</td>
<td>• Conduct one-on-one planning with team leader&lt;br&gt;• Provide agenda guidance&lt;br&gt;• Provide feedback to the team leader</td>
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<td><strong>Facilitator</strong>&lt;br&gt;using methods to solicit ideas so each member participates in generating ideas, interpreting findings, developing solutions, and making decisions</td>
<td>• Clarify team members’ roles&lt;br&gt;• Facilitate agenda. For example:&lt;br&gt;♦ Warm-ups&lt;br&gt;♦ Ground rules&lt;br&gt;♦ Idea generation&lt;br&gt;♦ Decision-making&lt;br&gt;♦ Data collection methods&lt;br&gt;♦ Data analysis&lt;br&gt;• Monitor sequence of model&lt;br&gt;• Focus team on task at hand&lt;br&gt;• Monitor stages of group development&lt;br&gt;• Manage group dynamics and individuals&lt;br&gt;• Cultivate cooperation. For example:&lt;br&gt;♦ Mediate&lt;br&gt;♦ Encourage&lt;br&gt;♦ Enforce ground rules&lt;br&gt;♦ Coach</td>
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<td><strong>Trainer</strong>&lt;br&gt;training team members</td>
<td>• Provide just in-time (JIT) training on:&lt;br&gt;♦ Models and tools&lt;br&gt;♦ Team roles and responsibilities&lt;br&gt;♦ Continuous improvement concepts</td>
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Facilitator Behaviors

To be proficient in the previously mentioned roles of effective facilitators, you may find yourself needing to practice one of the following behaviors:

The Facilitator . . .
- guides the group through a predetermined process/agenda
- encourages group members to participate
- focuses and refocus the group on common goals and tasks
- ensures an environment of mutual respect amongst group members
- explains their role and how they can help the group
- assesses the group’s progress and commitment for a given task and suggests alternative approaches as needed
- suggests agenda topics and approaches to most efficiently and effectively help the group meet its goals
- records group ideas in a way that allows participants to see and build on ideas
- trains group members on new tools and techniques just-in-time
- enforces the group’s ground rules when they are violated
- energizes the group through a positive and enthusiastic attitude
- manages conflict and helps the group find win-win solutions

One of the most common and helpful roles you may find yourself in as a facilitator is as a discussion moderator. In this role, you are primarily an observer who ensures that group members have an equal opportunity to contribute ideas and differ with each other. When ideas are introduced in their simple form, they often need time to take shape and be further developed before anyone has an opportunity to shoot them down. While it may seem contradictory, it is also important to allow for a healthy amount of differing when ideas are moving along and the group seems committed to them. This will help the group avoid the common pitfall of “groupthink.” This term was coined to describe a state when a group is moving along so efficiently that no one dares contradict or slow the momentum.

Another important reason to be a discussion moderator is that you usually find equal numbers of introverts and extroverts in any group. Extroverts often thrive in group settings because they find it natural to think aloud and build on other peoples ideas. Introverts are often at a disadvantage in most group settings because they are usually more reflective and hesitant to shout out ideas. They like to have extra time to process information. Excellent facilitators realize this and make adjustments to maximize the contributions of introverts while not slowing down the contributions of the extroverts.

Two facilitator behaviors help to encourage participation and protect ideas. These are gate opening and safe-guarding:

- **Gate opening:** Provide quiet individuals the opportunity to participate. Some people will not cut another person off and will wait for a quiet moment before speaking. In some meetings, there are little to no quiet moments. Create an opportunity like, “Petty Officer Gonzales, what do you think about this?”

- **Safe-guarding:** Ensure that individuals have a chance to finish their thoughts. When ideas begin to flow quickly, some members begin before others have finished. Not everyone has the ability to present a complete and polished thought off the top of their head. Safe-guarding might sound like: “Before we move ahead, let’s give Ms. Jones a chance to finish her thought.”
Facilitator Checklist

The following checklist can help you align with senior leadership, plan effectively, conduct productive meetings, and ensure action and follow up.

**Prior to Alignment Meeting**
- Research information on group
- Consider possible warm-ups
- Gather reference material (PIG, etc.)
- Review tools
- Prepare a contract
- Arrange meeting with team leader

**Alignment Meeting**
- Review contract—modify as appropriate
- Establish purpose, goal, and/or desired outcome
- Determine scope
- Get background information on team
  - Consider optimal size, composition, and representation
- Develop an agenda (see section on agendas)

**During Meeting**
- Review agenda—modify as appropriate
- Establish or review:
  - Roles
  - Secondary facilitation
  - Ground rules
  - Parking lot
  - Group expectations
- Conduct warm-up activity or icebreaker as appropriate
- Conduct meeting
  - Follow agenda
  - Use timekeeper
  - Monitor group dynamics
  - Demonstrate facilitative leadership
  - Record group memory
  - Use tools appropriately
  - Check parking lot
- Close meeting
  - Develop action plan
  - Review accomplishments
  - Review agenda
  - Clear parking lot
  - Develop future meeting plans
  - Conduct meeting evaluation

**Before Meeting**
- Gather supplies
- Ensure room is set up. (Optimal layout, equipment, etc.)

**After Meeting**
- Discuss meeting evaluation with team leader
- Follow up on contract
- Ensure action plans and minutes are developed
- Develop plan for next meeting
Facilitator Pitfalls

As you become more familiar with the facilitator behaviors, it is important to avoid some of the common mistakes many novice facilitators make:

The Facilitator should **AVOID**:

- taking sides on an issue the group is discussing
- passing judgment on ideas that are generated by group members
- contributing ideas without prior group approval
- being inflexible to the changing needs of the group
- being the center of attention
- talking too much
The Facilitative Leader

Often you may find yourself in charge of a group with no formal facilitator assigned. This is common because people are so busy in the Coast Guard and can rarely dedicate themselves full time to a group outside their usual job functions. Realizing the benefits of the facilitator role, Team Leaders are encouraged to take on some or all of the facilitative behaviors mentioned previously. While this can be a challenge, the best Team Leaders do this naturally. They already know where they stand on an issue and are committed to getting the best ideas from their Team, for often, these are the ideas from the workers who are most likely to implement them.

**Note**: If you find yourself favoring the Facilitative Leader role, it is important to let the group know when you are stepping out of your Facilitator Role and into a leader or group member role.