SPOT on Facilitation®

THIRD EDITION

Engaging People, Empowering Teams, Exceeding Goals

Prabu Naidu and Janice Lua

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INTRODUCTION

Without involvement,
there is no commitment.

Stephen R. Covey

What Is Facilitation?

According to International Institute for Facilitation (INIFAC)[1], "facilitation is the art and science of helping groups to be more effective in their meetings and decision-making. The tools and processes applied in facilitation encourage groups to use their diverse backgrounds, values, interests and capabilities to make higher quality decisions, increase their productivity, and improve their group dynamics. In short, facilitation enhances the interactions between individuals and groups in order to focus on results."



Encouraging participation to reach the desired outputs

[1] http://www.inifac.org

"Facilitators serve as guides, leaders and enablers. They play an important part in a well-run meeting by ensuring the meeting is productive, focused, inclusive and effective. Facilitators have skills in planning agendas, creating productive group environments, developing appropriate group processes, encouraging participation, and leading the group to reach its desired outcomes."

Traditional Facilitation

The genesis of traditional facilitation probably started long before we had the language for it. For many centuries, facilitation had been practised in ancient communities. In India, Pakistan and Nepal for example, 'panchayats' – a practice where the community gathered in a common space in their village while their elders and wise persons led in discussions, resolved disputes and decided on key issues relating to their village – was introduced a long time ago. In Malaysia and Brunei, village heads or 'penghulus' led similar community meetings. In China, village committees led by village leaders, also known as 'chun zhang', were also not unheard of. Elsewhere, the Native Americans, as well as other indigenous tribes from Latin America to Africa had similar councils that met, discussed, deliberated, decided and acted to achieve results that were mutually beneficial for the majority. It is through this walk back in history that we now know facilitation has been practised by our ancestors for ages, although it probably had not been conducted in the form that we now understand as process facilitation.

Value to Organisations in Using a Facilitative Approach

We find that the current generation of knowledge workers prefers to be consulted and involved in decision-making. After all, no single person has all the answers and facilitative approaches can engage everyone. But how does this approach add value to an organisation?

In the course of our work, we met a manager who made all the decisions then informed his staff to carry them out. He found that his staff were doing their bare minimum to get by, as they were simply operating in *compliant* mode. At our suggestion, he changed his approach and sought the opinion of his staff in making some key decisions. Initially, this new approach was met with reservation from the staff. But when they realised his true intentions, the staff became more participative and forthcoming, and even performed beyond his expectations. Simply by being engaged, the staff moved to operating in *commitment* mode. And by being engaged, the staff became supportive of their manager's plans because they felt consulted and valued.

Benefits of Facilitation

From experience, we find that the key benefits of using facilitation in groups include the following:

1. Increases opportunity for contribution

Professional facilitators support the shift to a participative management style. They not only know how to apply specific tools and techniques to achieve project and process management results, but also help meetings and groups to become more productive. Often, the people gathered in a room are not 'together'. But in the course of a facilitator's work, he helps 'bring these people together'. Since facilitation allows people to be heard, it provides opportunities for participants to build on each other's ideas and experiences. Often, a well facilitated meeting allows participants to leave with a sense of belonging to a group.

Since a meeting comprising a large group of people can be very hard to organise and control, facilitation can help resolve conflicts and clarify misunderstandings constructively. In these instances, using appropriate large group facilitation methods will allow for contribution from everyone.

2. Leverages on collective wisdom and experiences of staff

Facilitation can be extremely useful in helping groups develop consensus on issues by providing a safe psychological space for conversations, regardless of power and hierarchy.

3. Enhances motivation to support decisions made

Facilitation helps focus the energy and thoughts of the various members on the tasks at hand without bias. It encourages teamwork and joint responsibility for implementation since professionals are increasingly being tasked to work as members of groups. In *Transforming the Mature Information Technology Organization*, Dr. Robert A Zawacki uses the following formula:

Effective Decision (ED) = Right Decision (RD) x Commitment to the Decision (CD)

For example, would you prefer a 100% solution with a 20% commitment to action OR an 80% solution with a 90% commitment to action?

ED = RD X CD

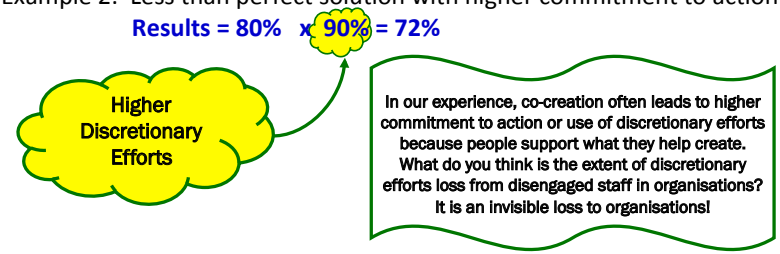
(Results) = (Solutions) x (Actions)

Example 1: Perfect solution with low commitment to action

Results = 100% x 20% = 20%

Example 2: Less than perfect solution with higher commitment to action

Results = 80% x 90% = 72%





Enhance motivation to support decisions made

4. Develops problem-solving and innovation skills

The use of divergent and convergent facilitation tools and techniques allow for creative ideas to be generated and solutions to problems developed.

5. Produces better results than individual efforts

As diverse and / or cross-functional groups become increasingly common in organisations, facilitators provide participative processes for group to work together. Through facilitation, groups leverage and build on existing synergies.

In our experience, many organisations seem to be facing a “communication problem”, facilitators can help improve communication and augment the quality of teamwork, participation and management of diverse groups of stakeholders. They provide channels for individuals to be heard.

6. Raises productivity

Some managers may think "My staff does what I tell them to do. Why should I involve them in any decision-making?" But it has been demonstrated that group problem-solving processes enable more effective and efficient solutions to be more readily implemented in a shorter time.

Facilitators help individuals and organisations develop solutions to address organisational issues. They demonstrate how organisations can save time and money when a diverse group of individuals is engaged and have a common goal. They are equipped with the ability to help groups solve problems through the effective use of process tools and techniques and help them reach realistic solutions.

7. Contributes to the overall organisational effectiveness and success

Businesses and organisations have been restructured to reduce manpower cost by streamlining functions. This often provides employees with more power and voice. Facilitation will enable them to take an active role in planning, organising, leading and coordinating business activities.

Coaching–Mentoring–Facilitation–Training–Consulting

Do you know what each of these terms mean? And can these terms be used interchangeably?

In the course of our work, we are often asked to explain the differences between coaching, mentoring, facilitation, training, and consulting, as they appear to be used interchangeably within an organisation. For clarity, we shall attempt to provide a simplified explanation on the role played by those who contribute to each of these areas in the table on Page 7 and 8.

Roles	Description
Coach	A coach works with individuals (also known as coachee(s)) in a one-to-one or group relationship to help him / them progress in specific areas. The International Coach Federation (ICF)[2] defines coaching as partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximise their personal and professional potential.

[2] http://www.coachfederation.org

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Consultant	Institute of Management Consultants[3] defines a management consultant as a professional who, for a fee, provides independent and objective advice to management of client organisations to define and achieve their goals through improved utilisation of resources. He or she may do this by diagnosing problems and /or opportunities, recommending solutions, and helping implement improvement.
Facilitative Trainer	During a training session, the trainer or guru brings content (knowledge and skills) to the learners. With process facilitation, the facilitator does not bring content, but helps the group move towards an outcome. A facilitative trainer delivers content in an engaging manner and involves the learners in the process. A trainer, however, imparts knowledge and skills usually in a group setting, and uses a more directive approach in doing so, such as through presentations and speeches.
Mentor	Coaches and Mentors of South Africa (COMENSA)[4] defines a mentor as someone whose "focus is the development of the learner, and about passing on personalised, domain-specific knowledge."
Process Facilitator	International Institute for Facilitation (INIFAC) defines facilitators as guides, leaders and enablers. They play an important part in a well-run meeting by ensuring the meeting is productive, focused, inclusive and effective. Facilitators have skills in planning agendas, creating productive group environments, developing appropriate group processes, encouraging participation, and leading the group to reach its desired outcomes.

[3] http://www.imcusa.org/?page=ABOUTCONSULTING
[4] http://www.comensa.org.za/ABOUT_US/What_is_Mentoring_.aspx

While each plays a different role within an organisation, a coach, consultant, facilitative trainer, mentor and process facilitator requires the same soft-skills like active listening and questioning, synthesising information, as well as suspending judgment. We feel that facilitative approaches can be applied in areas of consulting, training, coaching, and mentoring.



Facilitation skills can be applied in Coaching–Mentoring–Facilitation–Training–Consulting

Given the different types of expertise in the market space, it is important to clarify clients' needs and expectations during the client engagement process, so as to avoid misunderstanding and misplaced expectation. Let us share a case to illustrate this importance.

What Is Your Expertise?

Gerald received a call from the Operations Manager at Deep Ocean Marine Industries (DOMI) to help facilitate a one day off-site strategic planning session for the management team. As the client used the term 'facilitate', Gerald designed a program that he has delivered many times to other clients. Needless to say, it was a proven design that he was very confident of.

On the day of the event, Gerald started off with an introduction and a brainstorming session with the management team. He asked for each member to provide the information and data on the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) that the company faced.

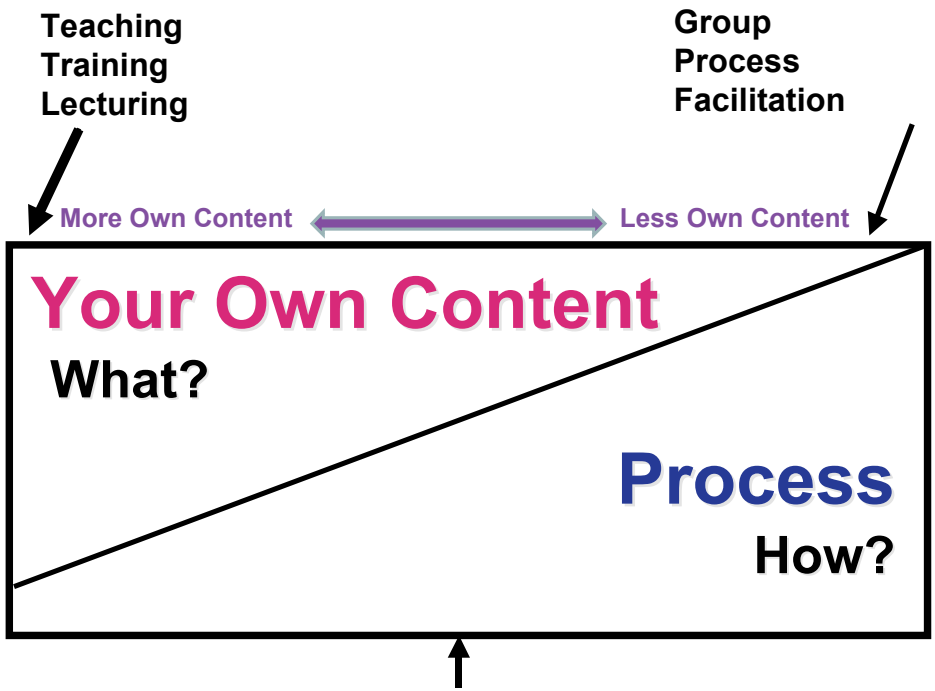
About 20 minutes into the exercise, the Managing Director (MD) got up and told Gerald, "I am puzzled as to why you are asking us for this information on the SWOT as I expect you to provide these to us."

Taken aback, Gerald replied, "The Operations Manager wanted me to facilitate this retreat. As a facilitator, I do not provide the information. Instead, I work with the participants to draw out the wisdom of the group and help them move towards a decision."

Upon hearing Gerald's reply, the MD rebutted: "No! That is not what I want! I expect YOU to provide all the information. That is what we are paying you for!"

At that moment, it dawned on Gerald that they had actually wanted a consultant and not a process facilitator! If Gerald had clarified the client's expectations prior to the event, it would have become clear to him that DOMI wanted an expert consultant in their field and not a process facilitator.

What can you do to ensure alignment of your client's expectations?



Content versus Process

Staying Neutral

Staying neutral assures the group you are facilitating that you will not influence the content of the discussion and that everyone's contribution matters. One of the ways to do this is to withhold your opinions during the session, be it through verbal or non-verbal expressions.

The process facilitator, unlike a facilitative trainer, must remain totally neutral on the content by:

1. Using non-judgemental language
2. Not imposing personal opinions / views on the group
3. Not influencing decisions / outcomes
4. Staying focused on the process and not stray into content
5. Remaining content neutral but understand the context

Sustainable Palm Oil

Some years ago, we were very privileged to have been involved in the facilitation of a Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO). In response to the urgent and pressing global call for sustainably produced palm oil, RSPO was formed in 2004 with the objective of promoting the growth and use of sustainable oil palm products through credible, global standards and the engagement of stakeholders. For latest updates, visit: http://www.rspo.org/



RSPO lead facilitator

During the three years (2005–2007) that we were involved in designing and facilitating the meetings, we learned a lot about the palm oil sector because of the many interactions with the various stakeholders. When we first embarked on facilitating RSPO, we had no clue about the palm oil industry. In fact, some of us had not even seen a palm fruit until the organisers displayed them on the table as decoration!



RSPO - Palm fruits on the table

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Sailing as a Metaphor for Facilitation

A metaphor that aptly describes facilitation is that of sailing. In sailing, you chart a course and during your journey to the destination, you respond to the changing environment and adjust your course accordingly. From start to finish, you hardly travel in a straight line but will arrive at the destination nevertheless. In this way, facilitation is very much like sailing where we plan the process design (i.e. chart the course) based on the desired outcome, and exercise flexibility during the execution of the process facilitation.



Facilitation is like sailing

As Chair of the International Institute for Facilitation, and someone who facilitates globally, I emphasise to groups that facilitation is like sailing, you've got to work with whatever arises, whether it's convenient or not, because the quality of the output, depends on the quality of the input.

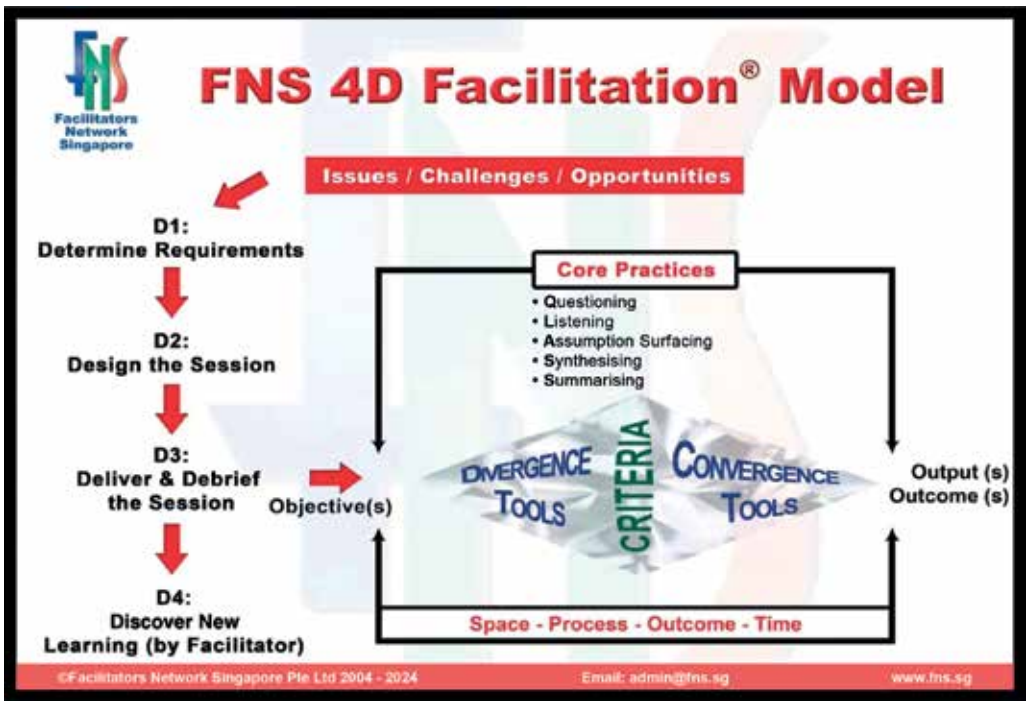
Eileen Dowse Ph.D.
Chair, International Institute for Facilitation (INIFAC)

FNS 4D FACILITATION® MODEL

An ounce of practice is worth more than tons of preaching.

Mahatma Gandhi (1869 – 1948)

In 2004, after founding the Facilitators Network Singapore (FNS), we drew upon prior writings on facilitation, our knowledge in social sciences, as well as our experiences, to develop a framework for facilitation called the FNS 4D Facilitation® Model.



FNS 4D Facilitation® Model

Issues / Challenges / Opportunities (Usually a business imperative)	Objective (Start the session with these meeting objectives)	Output (End the session with these)	Outcome (Will be realised ONLY if the outputs are effectively implemented)
Where do we hold the company's Annual Dinner & Dance?	To identify the venue for the company's Annual Dinner & Dance.	A prioritised list of possible venues for the company's Annual Dinner & Dance within the allocated budget.	Improved staff morale and staff retention. Happy customers served by satisfied employees.
The sales team and service team do not get along well.	To co-create the terms of agreement for improving the working relationship between the sales team and service team.	Agreed terms of behaviour and inter-team service level agreement so as to meet the business goals.	Better team collaboration. Higher customer satisfaction and repeat sales.
We are not as responsive to the market demands as compared to our competitors.	To generate the actions needed to be more responsive to market demands.	A list of action items that can be implemented so that we are more responsive, productive and innovative.	Improved sales and customer satisfaction.
Our products (or services) are out of date and we are losing customers.	To review our product (or service) specifications.	A list of changes, improvements or redesign to our product's (or service) features / specifications so that we can attract and retain customers.	Increased customer base and improved customer retention.
We are getting a new leader (manager) and we are concerned that we may not be able to get along well.	To understand the leader's preferences. To discuss concerns within the team and actions to address these concerns.	A list of 'likes' / 'dislikes' of the leader. A list of concerns within the team and what can be done to address these concerns.	High performing team. Happy customers served by happy staff.