



Improvement Cymru Academy Toolkit Guide



A Guide to Facilitation

Introduction

Facilitation is defined by the Cambridge Dictionary as ‘the act of helping other people to deal with a process or reach an agreement or solution without getting directly involved in the process, discussion, etc. yourself.’ (*Cambridge Dictionary, 2024*)

Facilitation allows a person, known as the facilitator, to guide a group through discussions and activities as a supportive and impartial guide. There are three key elements to the role of the facilitator:

1. The facilitator acts as a guide to help people work together through a process. This serves to draw out opinions from the people involved in the discussion and not give opinions and ideas themselves.
2. Facilitation is not only focussed on what is achieved but also on how people are involved in the process and how they participate.
3. A facilitator needs to take a neutral position.

A facilitator can be a third party, or a member of a team. It is their role to ensure the group feel supported and creates a safe environment where everyone has a chance to speak and be heard, so that all contributions are valued. Facilitation can help teams work together more effectively to achieve their goals.

Rationale

Facilitators help teams or groups to unlock their full potential. there are several reasons why you may want to use facilitator.

- **Guide discussions**

Facilitators guide group discussions, meetings, and workshops to create an inclusive environment to ensure everyone’s opinions are heard. They also manage time during discussions by ensuring the agenda is adhered to.

- **Conflict resolution**

Facilitators also help to avoid conflict between individuals or groups by aiding them to communicate effectively and work towards a mutually agreed shared goal.

- **Learning and Training**

In a learning environment, facilitators enhance the learning experience by encouraging people to actively participate, think critically and create a supportive and inclusive environment.

Facilitation is important because it can improve team dynamics, foster a collaborative working environment, and help teams to meet a common and shared goal.

When do you facilitate?

Facilitation has a place in a range of different settings. Here are some examples:

Team meetings: These are discussion based and ensure all team members contribute, where ideas are generated, and decisions are made as a group. Facilitation can enhance team meeting by ensuring they are productive, engaging, and inclusive.

Quality improvement projects: These occur where teams identify and address challenges in patient care or operational processes and work together to identify the root cause of the problem, agree on change ideas to test, and work towards sustainability of new practice. Facilitation in quality improvement (QI) projects help to create a structured and supportive environment that enhances the effectiveness and sustainability of QI initiatives.

Training and development workshops: These use a facilitator to capture ideas and discussions within the group to support the chair or lead of these meetings or workshops and to promote an inclusive environment where everyone is heard and valued.

How do you facilitate?

Meetings, workshops, training etc.. are a big part of working at any organisation and therefore individuals that work in the organisation need to have facilitation skills. This doesn't mean that you must be an expert. Here are several strategies that you can use to facilitate a session.

**Build trust
and rapport.**

Create an environment where people feel safe and comfortable to share their ideas. Introduce yourself and your role as a facilitator. It is good practice to agree the ways of working for the session between the group e.g. confidentiality, psychological safety, times of breaks, respect for each other etc. You could also use an ice breaker to help the group to feel more at ease. This can also create networking opportunities.

**Set clear
objectives.**

Define the purpose and outcomes of the session either before or at the very beginning of the session. This helps to manage expectations and provides clarity for the group.

**Take an
inclusive
approach.**

Engage with the group by offering a variety of ways for them to participate. For example, asking open ended questions, partner task work, using movement to answer questions, use images to demonstrate points. Be aware of any specific needs of individual group members that may impact on their ability to be involved. This will need to be identified before the session and in a sensitive way.

**Manage
time
effectively.**

Set an agenda for the session and agree with your group, the topics within each session and when breaks will take place. This manages expectations and provides momentum during tasks. It also creates a framework for the facilitator to work within.

Feedback

Providing a feedback questionnaire is an effective way to gauge how people felt and thought about the session provided. IT will help you to continue to develop your facilitation skills. Feedback examples for learners to complete:

- Writing on post it notes and placing on an allocated space in the room.
- In the form of an online form e.g., Microsoft Forms Survey
- Providing a paper version with a set of questions and comments for feedback.

While facilitating consider:

- What is the goal of the session? – Is everyone clear?
- Roles and responsibilities – what do you want people to do? It is helpful to agree any specific responsibilities individuals may have for the session, for example writing notes on a flip chart.
- Send an agenda out in advance so individuals will be informed about the goal of the meeting, the roles and responsibilities and a schedule for the session. Having this can help to promote an inclusive environment.
- Next steps – Be clear about actions agreed during the session and whose responsibility each action is and agree next steps with the group including timelines for tasks.

Ask yourself:

- Is everyone clear on the expectations from the session?
- What do I need for the environment where the session is happening? Room size, facilities etc

Remind yourself:

- As a facilitator, you are not chairing or leading the meeting.
- Your role as a facilitator is not acting as the trainer or chair, you are supporting the needs of the trainer / lead of the meeting.
- Are all stakeholders invited that can make a positive contribution?

What's Next?

Having used the guidance in this toolkit guide as part of the role within facilitation, preparation is key to a successful output for both the group within the team, and the meeting organisers.

Ensure you have considered what facilitation tools you can use within the session, as an example:

- Visual aids to record next steps or ideas (white boards or flip charts)
- An ideas car park to consider ideas outside the scope of the session but maybe relevant in the future.
- A SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats) (Please see our SWOT analysis toolkit guide for more information) to break the context from the meeting to work on the high-level output.
- Ease Benefit Matrix to highlight the ideas that generate high impact against minimal time or money required to complete the task. Look at our Divergent & convergent thinking toolkit guide for more information.

Helpful Tips

- Be an active listener, valuing everyone's input.
- Remain neutral and objective.
- Adapt your approach to suit the specific needs and dynamics of the group.
- Allow the learners to do more of the speaking.
- It can also be beneficial to ask the group "What went well?" and "What could have been even better if?" This will allow stakeholders to have given you feedback and for you to continually improving future sessions.

Additional resources

If you would like to learn more about making improvement to your workplace, take a look at our webpage for what we offer you [Improvement Cymru Academy - Public Health Wales \(nhs.wales\)](#) or email us improvementcymruacademy@wales.nhs.uk to find about the improvement courses we can offer.

Further Reading

Cambridge Dictionary (2024). Facilitation: English Meaning – Cambridge Dictionary. Accessed from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/facilitation> (Accessed 10 April 2024)

Community Toolbox. (2023). Community Toolbox – Chapter 16 Group Facilitation and Problem-Solving. Accessed from <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents> (Accessed 10 April 2024)

NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement (2009) The Facilitator's Toolkit Tools, techniques, and tips for effective facilitation. [online] <http://www.england.nhs.uk/improvement-hub/wp-content/uploads/sites/44/2017/11/Facilitator-Toolkit.pdf> [Accessed 10 October 2024].

Shwartz, K. L., et al. (2017). Effective facilitation of interdisciplinary team functioning: A qualitative study of health care professionals' perceptions. BMC Health Services Research, 17(1),1-11.

Schuman,S.& Bartscherer,T. (Eds). 2017. Facilitation at a Glance: A Pocket Guide of Tools and Techniques for Effective Meeting Facilitation. Jossey-Bass