FACILITATION AND MEETING MANAGEMENT

Speaking, Thinking and Acting Like A Facilitator

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A Healthy Systems How-To Guide Supplement

Facilitation and Meeting Management: Thinking, Speaking and Acting Like a Facilitator Healthy Systems How To Supplement 2004

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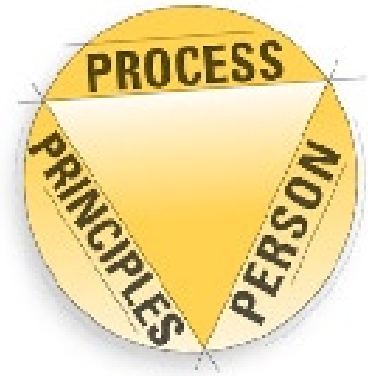
How-To Guide Supplement:
Speaking, Thinking and Acting Like a Facilitator

In mastering facilitation, there are process steps to follow, tools to use, principles to follow and mental models to hold. There are personal skills and disciplines to practice. All of this knowledge is put to the test during a meeting and it all must be applied at the same time! All the abstract tools, lists and tips are be brought to life through the words and actions of the facilitator.

The following table provides sample words and phrases to use at various times throughout the meeting. The table is organized by meeting process — what to say at the start, during and at the end of the meeting. If you are a new facilitator, these words will prove invaluable in getting started. If you are an experienced facilitator, you may find the table useful in broadening your verbal repertoire!

Have a phrase to add to our table? Send your input to info@healthysystems.net. If selected, we'll give credit where credit is due!

Thinking, Speaking and Acting Like a Facilitator

Examples of words and phrases to use in your formal and informal meetings*

Planning and Starting a Meeting

Purpose and Type	·If you have been invited to a meeting and there is no formal agenda, you may need to help identify the purpose through informal questioning. "What exactly is it that you want to talk about?" ·If you called the meeting, explain why you called it and in general what its goal is. "Thanks for meeting with me. I called you to this meeting in order to (or because) _____. ·Later the group or facilitator can restate the purpose as more specific Desired Outcomes. ·If the meeting has been planned and you are starting the meeting, state its overall purpose. This is an effective initial method of focusing the group. "The purpose of today's meeting is _____"
Time Keeping	·"Is this the right time to meet?" ·"Do we need to talk/do this right now? I am wondering what your deadline is" ·"How much time is there/will this take?" ·"This is a two-hour meeting. It ends at _____." ·"We have a lot to cover in a short period. If we stay focused, I think we can get it all completed. Let me know if I am going too fast."
Context Setting	·Explain why they were asked to attend ·Explain anything that is currently going on in the environment that they know about – acknowledge it and recognize their effort, sacrifice etc. ·Explain pertinent information they may not know that they need to know to be oriented and "bought in" ·Review what happened at the last meeting. ·Review how this meeting fits into next steps or larger initiatives.
Desired Outcomes	·"Let's list what we need to accomplish." ·"We need to decide/agree on what we are going to do about . . ." ·"We need to get a shared understanding of _____ so that _____." ·"I need to understand . . .so that" "Help me get clear on . . ." ·" What exactly do we want to have by the end of this meeting?"

Identifying Stakeholders and Attendees	·"Do we have the right people here?" (to meet desired outcomes) ·"Shouldn't _____ be here?" ·"Do we have all the needed viewpoints represented?"
Identifying Functions and Roles	·"Who can take notes?" ·"Can someone keep time and make sure we don't go over on any of our agenda items? Who likes to watch the clock?" ·For each function, provide a few basic guidelines and expectations. This serves as an informal contract and helps to orient the person in that role. ·To members: "Okay you guys, we don't have much time and this is an emergency. I need for you to be on your toes and help resolve this issue ASAP." ·To the scribe: "Take down all the key words and phrases that you hear. And when we agree on something I will signal that to you and make sure that gets recorded. Also, if you hear anything that sound like an action we will need to take later, record those too. We'll come back to those at the end." ·To the timekeeper: "Please let me know when there are five minutes left on any agenda item. Thanks."
Arranging Location and Room set up	·"Are you okay standing here? " ·"How's the temperature? Do we need more ventilation?" ·"Should we record our notes on flip chart paper or at our table on a pad of paper?" ·"Can you hear me? Should I speak up?" ·"Can you all see?" ·"Is this a suitable place to talk?" ·"Let's move over here . . . let's find a quieter spot . . . let's move into a conference room."

Making Decisions	·If authority and decision-making method is known, explain it to the group – both authority and method within the group and outside of the group. For example, "As you know, your team charter states that you will make decisions by consensus. Consensus means that an option may not be your first choice but it is not a "deal-breaker" for you, and you agree to support it and help make it happen. However, your consensus agreements WITHIN the group become recommendations to the executive team outside of this group. Your team does not have the authority to act; merely to recommend action."

·If there is no known or agreed on method for decision-making, propose/ suggest (or ask, tell, etc.) how decision-making might happen best in this context, OR propose 2 or 3 options for decision-making and let the group decide how to decide. For example, "This is a complex, long-term project with many diverse opinions. I propose we try and gain consensus. If we have not come to complete agreement by December 15, we will fall back on a vote."

·If you are the leader as well as the facilitator your may in certain time-constrained circumstances make a statement such as this, "Given the emergency nature of this situation, I called this meeting to get your ideas and then I will make recommendations to central office by 5 p.m. Please give me as much input as possible. I need your help on this. I am looking for general agreement but ultimately I will have to act in the best interest of the situation and as I see it." |
| **Setting Ground Rules** | ·In developing new Ground Rules, the facilitator may need to seed the conversation with questions such as, "How do you feel about time – end on time no matter what?" "How do you feel about input, do you want to just shout it out or go around the table?"

·After creating the list of Ground Rules has been agreed to, "This list of ground rules is your group's behavioral contract with one another. Adhering to these ground rules will help build trust and will promote efficiency and effectiveness."

·At any time a ground rule is not being followed, the facilitator might want to address the issue in the Start Up or Wrap Up portion of the agenda, "I have noticed _____. You agreed on _____ in your Ground Rules. I would encourage you as a team to either adhere to the ground rule or to change it to something that you value." |
| **Creating the Agenda** | ·If the group does not have an agenda, take a few minutes at the beginning of the meeting to get focused. First list the Desired Outcomes. Prioritize and sequence the list. Then place times next to each desired outcome. "It sounds like you could spend most of our time on this? Maybe 30 minutes? How long will this next item take? ….How's this for a plan?"

·Whether a formal or informal agenda, as you move to a new topic (desired outcome), present the topic, explain what the goal of that section is and then propose a way to proceed to get there. If you have a formal agenda, read the desired outcome verbatim. For example, "Let's turn our attention next the abnormally high scrap rate. We need a list of all the things that might be causing this situation. From our brainstormed list we'll try to figure out the most likely culprits. At the end, we hope to come away with a ranked list of sources of this problem." |

During the meeting – Principles of facilitation

Stay on Track: same step, same way and at the same time	·(During brainstorming) "Let 's give everyone a chance to input here. For now, let's refrain from being critical of any ideas."
	·(During Q&A) "Let me remind you that we are clarifying only here. Before we discuss or debate, let's make sure we understand what is being said."
	·(During Wrap up if a member opens up a new topic for discussion) "I realize that this is an important topic. Unfortunately we are in our closing phase and undoubtedly don't have time to cover the topic and end the meeting on time as well. Feel free to talk informally here after the formal close of the meeting"
Circle Spiral Circle	·"Here's where we are, here's where we want to get to – so, how might we proceed?"
Opening, Closing-In, Closing-Out	·OPENING PHASE. "Let's explore…"
	·CLOSING-IN PHASE. "Do you see any patterns or trends?" "Let's prioritize our list." "Can we take a straw pole?"
	·CLOSING-OUT PHASE. "Does anyone have a proposal? "Have we reached agreement? "Is there anyone who does not agree?" "Let's vote."
First Understanding, then Agreement	·Phrases to use in checking for understanding: "Do you understand?" "Have we covered the topic adequately?" "Have we surfaced (explored) all the issues around this topic?" "Do you feel you understand the topic enough to move into decision making?"
	·Phrases to use in gaining agreement: "If the group understands the topic at hand, does anyone have a proposal or a solution to recommend?" "Would you explain your proposal further?" "Is the proposal clear? If so, what do you think? Do you agree?"
little agreements add up to Big Agreements	·"We have some areas of agreement but we aren't there yet? What DO we agree on?"
	·"If we break this issue down into its component parts, there are really three little agreements. Let try and agree on one or more of the parts."
	·"What's the minimum agreement we can get today?"
	·"It's going to take longer than we thought to resolve this issue. In the meantime, what have we decided?"
	·"Do we agree that _____?"

Go Slow at First	·"Let's be clear on this before we move on." ·"I know this is painful, but we are laying a foundation for future work." ·"Let's not rush this." ·"Agreements that are rushed often do not stick when challenged." ·"I want to make sure you all understand what is being said. Can someone summarize?" ·"We want to provide enough time for everyone to be aligned and clear on our _____. Time we spend now will save us time and frustration later in the project."
Use the Existing Meeting Architecture	·(Looking at the agenda) "Here's where we are." ·(Looking at the Ground Rules) "Here are our Ground Rules" ·(Reading from the minutes) "Please read the group our last agreement." ·(Referring to the last meeting's minutes) "We agreed we would focus on these topics today." ·(Pointing to the agenda on the wall) "We have about 30 minutes if we are to stick with our agree on time frame." ·(Referring to the 4th column of the agenda) "At the beginning of the meeting, I explained that my role in this meeting is to..."
Accept, Legitimize, Deal, Defer	·(Accept Legitimize Defer) "I hear what you are saying" (OR) "What I hear you saying is .... and I know it's a critical issue (OR it's important to you). However, it's not on the agenda for today's meeting. So . . ." ·(Accept Legitimize Defer) "I suggest we stick with the agreed on agenda items and put your idea in the parking lot for a later meeting. We will revisit it at the end of this meeting and decide where your issue belongs." ·(Accept Legitimize Deal/Defer? to group) "I am wondering if the group wants to deal with this now? If we stick with our current time frame, we'd have ___ minutes to explore this topic and we would not be able to address our Desired Outcomes." ·(Accept Legitimize Deal) "I saw lots of head nodding when you brought this up. It seems to me the group needs to discuss this topic before it can continue. I propose you put your regular agenda aside for now. Let's check in on our time in 30 minutes. Okay?"

Focus on Interests, Not Positions	·When a member(s) take a position, especially a heated or emotional position, there is the tendency f or the group to become fragmented, factional and oppositional. The facilitator's job is to dig beneath the words for the interest, deeper meaning, belief or assumption that motivated the position. The facilitator hopes to discover common interests as a ground for agreements. ·"Can you tell me more? Why you take the position you do?" ·"I think I hear that each of you believes _____. Is this true?" ·" What do you mean when you say that? Can you clarify (or explain)?" (Repeat it back and edit if need be and have the scribe write it down if possible)
Remain Neutral and Build Trust	·"As a facilitator, my role is to watch the process, protect participants so all have the opportunity to participate and help you reach the outcomes you want to accomplish. As facilitator, I need to remain as neutral as possible to accomplish this – process, person and outcomes/results. If you here me getting into content – telling you that one option is better than another – please call me on it." ·"If you chose to take this action as a group see these options...and these are the consequences of each option." ·"It is hard for me to be neutral on this topic. (If part of the organization) I'd like to participate in the discussion. Can I temporally step down from my role as facilitator and give my opinion?

Wrapping up and closing the meeting

Learning and reflection	·"Let's review what have we done?" ·"How would you apply what we have decided today?" ·Could someone please restate the agreement you just reached? How might you paraphrase your team decision?"
Next steps/ Next meeting	·"What's next?" ·"Do we need another meeting? If so, where?" ·"When will we get back together?" ·"Who needs to be there?"
Action items	·"Your next meeting is _____. Before that meeting, your team has some work to do." ·"Action Items identify what needs to be completed, who will do the work, and a specific date by which the work will be completed. So, we need the What's, the Who's and By When's." ·"We have some follow-up. What needs to be done? Who can do it? When can you deliver?" ·(If no one volunteers) "Is this action items important? If so, who is willing to take responsibility?"
Evaluation	·"What went well? Please be specific." ·"Is this (time, place, agenda format, frequency, etc) working?" ·"What needs to change? Can you give us specific improvements?" ·"Are these meetings relevant? Why or why not?"

* The Process and Principle categories listed in the left-hand column are introduced in Healthy Systems How-To Guides for Meeting Management and Facilitation.

About Healthy Systems

Healthy Systems is a management consulting firm that aligns and integrates the people, processes and strategic directions of an organization—for the health of the organization and the well-being of its employees.

We train and coach organizations in the dynamics of complex systems and in the skills, tools and strategies for creating and sustaining a vital and balanced workplace.

Healthy Systems works in collaboration with organization development and training specialists to meet your specific and customized needs.

Healthy Systems provides consulting and customized training for organizational effectiveness, focusing on methods to create and sustain vitality and relevance in meetings, projects, processes, planning and interpersonal relationships.

About Sara Grigsby

Sara Grigsby has worked professionally as an organizational development consultant, trainer and facilitator since 1985, providing project-based management, coaching, training and event facilitation services to a variety of corporate, public agency and health care clients.
Sara is the founder of Healthy Systems and its lead consultant.

She has been writing about Organization Development and creating tools to help others create healthy systems since 1995. Her CV is available online: http://healthysystems.net/htmls/about/sara.html

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