

FACILITATION

Written by,

**Antone Aboud, Ph.D.
Antone Aboud Associates, Inc.**

FACILITATION

WHAT IS FACILITATION?

According to Weaver and Farrell, “(f)acilitation is a process through which a person helps others complete their work and improve the way they work together.” To the extent that a group of people must make a decision together, a facilitator will focus on **how** the decision is made. We assume that by focusing on the process associated with making the decision, the facilitator will also help the group make the very best decision possible.

Facilitating a meeting is different from conducting a meeting. I might convene a group of people to merely relay information. The group has no reason to be there other than receive the information and ask questions should I be willing to entertain questions. I have not helped the group complete any particular work nor have I even attempted to improve the way they work together. Or I might want a group of colleagues to endorse an idea I believe is a worthy course of action. I might convene a meeting or raise the issue at a scheduled meeting. I might present the idea in the best light, minimize dialogue, manipulate the discussion and seek a quick vote which shows a majority of those present have acquiesced to my position. Again, I have not helped the group complete any particular task. And I did not in any way help them improve the manner in which they interact in that forum.

Facilitation is an important role where the following assumptions are shared by the organization.

1. How we make a decision is as important as the decision itself. In other words, there are right and wrong ways to collect and process information as a part of the decision making process.
2. The quality of our interpersonal behavior is important to our ability to achieve desired outcomes.

If either of these two assumptions is not correct, the management of any organization is not likely to support the development of an internal facilitation capability nor utilize available external sources in a productive way.

THE FACILITATION PROCESS: GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

At one level the role of the facilitator may look little different from the role any person might play when “conducting” a meeting. As examples, the facilitator will:

- Begin the meeting;
- Pay attention to an agenda [which would have been developed prior to the meeting];
- Recognize various individuals as they choose to speak;
- Recognize individual speakers;
- Implement procedures around which discussions will occur;
- Regain order if the meeting breaks down; and,
- Eventually bring the meeting to a close.

But the facilitator will look at these various milestones or events much differently than someone who merely “conducts” a meeting. For example, with respect to beginning a meeting, the facilitator will not just walk into a meeting site and begin speaking. He or she will arrive early and pay particular attention to greeting individuals as they arrive in a manner that is most likely to set individuals at ease. The facilitator will not just regain order in the meeting if the meeting breaks down, but will regain order in a manner that will not cause any person unnecessary embarrassment nor create a reluctance among those attending to participate.

It is altogether possible for someone to never use the word “facilitate” but still facilitate a meeting. In other words, it’s not what we call the role, but **how we behave** that determines whether facilitation has occurred.

THE FACILITATION PROCESS: A QUALITY TOOL?

In much recent literature, writers have often associated “facilitation” with the quality movement in management. The argument occurs as follows.

There is an older style of management that assumes that individuals with greater authority are, all things being equal, wiser and more capable than their subordinates. Meetings are opportunities for those subordinates to provide whatever information and/or ideas the superior official may request. However, the superior will manage that forum in a manner that will result in decisions consistent with what he or she believes is in the best interest of the organization of which they are a part. Facilitation is a process that is inconsistent with the more authoritarian style of management. A facilitator will seek conflicting information from whatever source, promote open communication between and among all participants, regardless of rank and promote decision making by consensus, even if the result may be different from what any particular superior might have initially preferred.

There is much truth to this argument. Facilitation is a process that would be consistent with quality management, to the extent that quality management also refers to a decision making process that requires frequent, open and honest communication at all levels within an organization. Many of the facilitator's tools – e.g., brainstorming or the affinity diagram – allow individuals to participate in a meeting equally regardless of rank. Authoritarian structures would be less likely to tolerate such processes.

At the same time, it is possible for an individual to invoke a number of the elements associated with facilitation without necessarily participating fully in a quality management system. Quality management is more than the existence of facilitated processes. An organization might not be fully committed to a quality management effort, but nonetheless still expect meetings to occur consistent with those standards that define facilitation.

DESCRIBING FACILITATION AS A COMPETENCY

[Attachment A](#) is a competency-based description of the facilitation process as it applies to a meeting. As it is written it only provides the skeleton of the meeting itself. In its most ambitious form a facilitation competency would identify elements associated with its most common use: **a group's attempt to solve a problem**. For example, Element 7 reads as follows:

Did I ask participants to address issues in the order contained on the agenda?

In truth an agenda item of this sort might read as follows:

Task:

Improve the speed with which we respond to written requests for information from external customers, particularly teachers.

In asking participants to address that issue, a facilitator would initiate a problem solving methodology requiring the group to:

- Define the problem in operational terms;
- Collect data relevant to possible solutions;
- Assess possible solutions; and,
- Decide which alternative[s] would be the best solution[s] to the problem.

It is altogether possible that individuals participate in a problem solving encounter that is conducted in a manner which is **not** consistent with what we understand to be a properly facilitated activity. For example, the following illustrates how someone might begin problem solving without engaging in "...a process through which a person helps others complete their

work and improve the way they work together.”

Example 1

As I recall, we're here for the following purpose: To improve the speed with which we respond to written requests for information from external customers, particularly teachers.

To get us started a bit more efficiently, I've drafted a description of the problem, really a detailed description of the issues that have brought us together. ...[Passes out document]... Please take a quick look at this and see if it's pretty much what you think are the issues. If so, we can get started on the development of some solutions.

As you can see, the person is essentially telling the group at the outset how the group ought to properly define the problem under consideration, treating at least this portion of the process as his or her responsibility, rather than as the group's responsibility. A facilitator would, on the other hand, focus on the **group's** responsibility to do the work. A person whose performance is more consistent with the role of a facilitator may have introduced the issue as follows.

Example 2

As I recall, we're here for the following purpose: To improve the speed with which we respond to written requests for information from external customers, particularly teachers.

Generally when we approach an issue of this sort, we ought to spend some time developing a detailed description of the problem so that we all have the clearest idea of what we have to accomplish. Since everyone at this meeting is on this committee because of their involvement with our external customers, I'd like to ask each person in the group to take five minutes and write down every example you can think of where an external customer was unhappy with the service they received from this office.

This second example is more consistent with our understanding that the facilitator will, “[help] others complete their work.”

Any competency statement must, then, not only make reference to the problem solving nature of the meeting, but also describe the **methods** a facilitator will use to help the group engage in problem solving.

Facilitating a Meeting

[\[Return to Manual\]](#)

Perhaps the single most common activity associated with bureaucracy is the meeting. We make jokes about their frequency, their duration and their effectiveness. We search for ways to reduce their intrusion into our lives. For example, we believe that we can eliminate some face-to-face interactions by creating "net meetings," the interaction of individuals via their computer to discuss issues and resolve problems.

Still, the actual conduct of a meeting is a central way in which we share ideas and make decisions. In observing the conduct of a meeting one can understand an organization's commitment to such values as inclusiveness and individual respect. Do we really empower staff or do we expect subservience to predetermined outcomes?

	Element
1	Did I greet individuals as they entered the meeting area?
2	Did I use each person's name as I greeted him or her?
3	Did I introduce myself to those individuals with whom I was not previously familiar?
4	Did I begin the meeting on time?
5	Did I review the reason for the meeting with the group before beginning discussion of the agenda?
6	Did I ask participants to identify the individual who would keep minutes of the meeting?
6a	If an initial meeting, did I ask the group to consider establishing ground rules?
7	Did I ask participants to address issues in the order contained on the agenda?
8	Did I use facilitation tools as necessary in helping the participants complete their work?
9	Did I allow sufficient time to consider each issue raised?
10	Did I allow opportunity for all those with an interest in speaking an opportunity to speak?
11	Did I avoid letting one person dominate the discussion?
12	If someone interrupted another, did I redirect the floor to the individual who was originally speaking?
13	Did I conclude each agenda item with a clear record of what, if anything, had been decided?
14	For each agenda item for which there was a decision, did I assist the group in assigning responsibility for any subsequent work that decision might require consistent with the standards identified in the competency, " Delegating Work "?
15	Did we conclude the meeting on time?
16	Did I thank the group for their participation?
17	When speaking, did I communicate consistent with the standards identified in the competencies, " Communicating Orally " and " Listening Actively "?

Commentary

Element 1 **Did I greet individuals as they entered the meeting area?**

When we ask a facilitator to greet individuals as they enter, we are asking that the facilitator take a few seconds with each person to become involved at a personal level before the meeting begins. This, of course, assumes that the facilitator arrives sufficiently early to accomplish this task.

Regardless, such a greeting ought not appear as a blatant attempt to ingratiate oneself with the group's members.

Element 2 **Did I use each person's name as I greeted him or her?**

Actually, this is a technique to insure that we not take a person's name for granted. In our society, knowing someone's name is a sign of respect. If we ask ourselves to use the name in the initial greeting, we cannot avoid identifying each of those individuals whose names we do not know. That realization will prompt us to address Element 3.

Element 3 **Did I introduce myself to those individuals with whom I was not previously familiar?**

If we realize in greeting individuals that we have not yet met, we should introduce ourselves at that point. Taking a few seconds to learn the person's name and their reason for attending the meeting will help the facilitator interact more effectively with that person during the meeting. At the same time, that person will have had at least one face-to-face contact with the facilitator prior to having to interact as a member of the group.

Element 4 **Did I begin the meeting on time?**

Beginning a meeting at the appointed hour has become one of the benchmarks of effective meeting management. It might be that this is a standard to which you will have to work with each group. The first meeting might start late, as individuals wander in from their various activities. The facilitator will make a point of the need to begin on time in order to allow the group sufficient time to perform their work. The end of the meeting would provide an opportunity to remind individuals to arrive on time for the next encounter. An e-mail reminder the morning of the meeting would also be a means of reinforcing the need to begin without delay.

Element 5 Did I review the reason for the meeting with the group before beginning discussion of the agenda?

As the meeting begins, the facilitator will help the group fix on their objective by stating orally what he or she believes is that objective. In some cases the objective might have been written – for example, in the memo asking individuals to attend the meeting. In that event, the facilitator might make reference to that document. For example:

At our last meeting we developed a five step work plan dealing with computer training in the unit. According to the work plan, we now have to develop a training schedule for the next three months that would provide at least six hours of training to each staff person with a minimum of disruption to our work flow. In other words, I understand that at the conclusion of our meeting, we must have completed that three month training schedule.

Element 6 Did I ask participants to identify the individual who would keep minutes of the meeting?

You will notice that we don't ask the facilitator to assign someone to take minutes. The facilitator asks the group to make that decision. The group may decide to assign the task to the same person each time, or rotate the task. Regardless, someone must be responsible for keeping sufficient records of the group's activities.

In many cases the 'minutes' will truly be a record of the group's hands-on activities. For example, if the group engages in a brainstorming activity, the person taking minutes would keep a record of all of the ideas and/or pieces of information that activity generated. If the group subsequently engaged in a weighted voting process to eliminate the large number of ideas to a manageable few, the person taking minutes would record the results of the weighted voting.

Element 6a If an initial meeting, did I ask the group to consider establishing ground rules?

The simplest way to approach the issue of ground rules is to distribute the [boilerplate ground rule document](#) contained in this manual. The group can consider the ground rules and amend them as they see fit.

Ground rules are an element that should occur quite early in the group's deliberations. The commitments individuals make in their creation will help each person to understand his or her role when working together to solve problems. Also, the standards of conduct inherent in the final document will endow the facilitator with authority as he or she seeks to keep individuals on task.

Element 7 Did I ask participants to address issues in the order contained on the agenda?

In preparing the agenda, there ought to have been consideration with respect to the logical sequence in which issues should be addressed. For example, a group ought to address the definition of the problem before identifying solutions to the problem. As facilitators we should then ask participants to address each issue in sequence, understanding that without completing the first agenda item, our ability to help the group address the second item will be compromised.

There may be cases where the agenda items are not integrated in such a logical manner. In that situation there may be reason to jump immediately to item 4. The facilitator ought, where such an issue appears, allow the group to discuss and, if possible, reach a consensus on how to proceed. Nonetheless, if the group seems hopelessly entangled in that discussion, the facilitator ought take responsibility to decide the order of discussion simply to insure that the meeting time not be wasted. In making that decision, the facilitator ought consider the reasons for the group's initial concern to go out of order, not just revert back to the original agenda.

Element 8 Did I use facilitation tools as necessary in helping the participants complete their work?

Facilitators help others accomplish their work. That work will always be related to the making of a decision. When one uses a problem solving methodology to make that decision, individuals will participate in a series of activities which occur in the following order: 1] defining the problem; 2] collecting relevant data; 3] evaluating that data, including identifying the best alternative[s].

The facilitator has certain tools at his or her disposal to accomplish the group's objective. The following are the most useful.

1] Collecting Relevant Data

[Brainstorming](#)
[Affinity Process](#)
[Research](#)

2] Evaluating Relevant Data

[Voting](#)

Small and Large Group Discussions
Evaluation Criteria

Control Analysis
Advantages vs. Disadvantages
Costs vs. Benefits
Force Field Analysis
Wants vs. Needs

3] Identifying Best Alternative[s]

Developing Consensus

Element 9 **Did I allow sufficient time to consider each issue raised?**

The facilitator will often be the person responsible for managing time during a meeting. In some cases an agenda itself will be timed. However, if the objective of any decision making process – including the activities associated with a meeting – is to make informed decisions, then a facilitator must be sensitive to the nature of the discussion which emerges with respect to any particular agenda item. If participants continue to offer information, ideas or analysis which is not merely a restatement of previously offered items, then the facilitator would likely continue that discussion. It is possible that a previously constructed plan to conclude discussion within twenty minutes, for example, was not consistent with the interests individuals brought to the meeting.

If circumstances warrant, one might have to continue the meeting at another time in order to achieve an appropriate milestone in the decision process.

Element 10 **Did I allow opportunity for all those with an interest in speaking an opportunity to speak?**

Consistent with element 9, a facilitator must be sensitive to an interest someone displays in speaking. In many cases an individual will display interest overtly. In other cases individuals might tentatively express interest, by quickly raising then lowering a hand or making a mouth movement as if to begin speaking but stopping before uttering a word. In the latter cases, the facilitator should note the expression of interest and specifically invite that person to speak with a comment like: “Joe, it looks as if you want to say something.”

The less overt expressions of interest are good reason to expect a facilitator to frequently glance at individual participants to identify non-verbal cues associated with their interest in speaking.

Element 11 **Did I avoid letting one person dominate the discussion?**

One of a facilitator's most difficult jobs is to deal with a participant who effectively dominates a discussion. In some cases the individual will begin speaking and never "give up the floor." In other cases the individual will either interrupt or pick up the floor immediately after each other person has spoken, often providing commentary or feedback to the just completed speaker. Individuals of this ilk can easily discourage other from speaking.

Certainly, one way to avoid letting one person dominate discussion is to always remind participants of the ground rules. In addition, the facilitator should always:

- 1] Peruse the room for interest in speaking.
- 2] Identify the order of speakers based on the timing of their expression of interest. State the order aloud. For example: "Frank, go ahead, then Jane, Lisa and Mike will speak."

That overt identification of speaker precedence often will squelch someone from creating a running commentary on the discussion.

With respect to the person who might seek never to relinquish the floor, the facilitator must be mindful to pay close attention to that speaker – although, periodically glancing around to determine others' interest in speaking. At some point when it is clear the presentation is either redundant or irrelevant, the facilitators should look for a moment when the speaker is between thoughts or catching his or her breath, and make a comment such as: "Thank you, Frank, you've made a number of points. Right now I need to allow Lisa to speak." At that point the facilitator should look at Lisa and say something to the effect: "Lisa, what is it that you wanted to say?"

Element 12 **If someone interrupted another, did I redirect the floor to the individual who was originally speaking?**

This element is immensely easier to accomplish if the group has created ground rules, one of which prohibits interruptions. In that case the facilitator has the advantage of reminding the person who interrupts of the ground rule to which all had agreed.

However, even without ground rules in place, there is a simple method to redirect the conversation back to the original speaker. As the person interrupting begins speaking, the facilitator should immediately say, "Frank, I need to allow Lisa to complete her thought. We'll get to you next." If you had already identified an order of presentation, indicate to Frank that you will place him next in that order.

It is always critical that the facilitator interjects his or her comment immediately after the start of the interruption. If the person who interrupts continues speaking for 5 or 10 seconds without redirection, it will be more difficult for the facilitator to find an appropriate moment to speak. In fact, Frank would then be likely to conclude that the facilitator did not like the substance of his comment and therefore decided to prevent him from continuing.

Element 13 Did I conclude each agenda item with a clear record of what, if anything, had been decided?

Of course, the recorder will actually make the notation; however, the facilitator should prompt that activity to take place. Also, the facilitator should ask the recorder to read back verbatim what he or she had written. In many cases the actual dialogue will take place based on the actual work product groups will have created for an activity. For example, if the agenda required a brainstorming activity, the recorder would have already written each item offered by the groups and read the notation back consistent with the brainstorming competency contained in this manual.

A clear recording of each meeting outcome will also avoid future conflict over what the participants intended based on their work during the decision process itself.

Element 14 For each agenda item for which there was a decision, did I assist the group in assigning responsibility for any subsequent work that decision might require consistent with the standards identified in the competency, "Delegating Work"?

A major source of conflict among groups occurs after a decision process ends but the group does not clearly assign responsibility for follow-up activities. The facilitator should prompt to group to make such assignments. The “delegating work” competency provides some guidelines for that purpose. The facilitator should keep in mind that it is not his or her responsibility to make the assignments, but only to help the group in making the assignments.

Element 15 Did we conclude the meeting on time?

Undoubtedly one of the criteria each participant will address in evaluating a decision making encounter is the degree to which the meeting concludes no later than the scheduled hour. The facilitator, or a group appointed timekeeper, should periodically remind participants with respect to elapsed time. If there is compelling reason to extend a meeting past the scheduled hour, the facilitator should present the issue to the group for its decision.

Element 16 Did I thank the group for their participation?

The facilitator has but two sources of authority: the formal responsibility assigned to him or her at the outset of the encounter, and, the personal leadership he or she is able to establish with those who participate. Taking the time to thank each participant at the end of the meeting acknowledges the second source. It also models a somewhat ignored interpersonal skill: saying “thank you.”

Element 17 When speaking, did I communicate consistent with the standards identified in the competencies, "Communicating Orally" and "Listening Actively"?

At whatever stage we find ourselves when facilitating a project, we must always base our communications on the commonly accepted standards of interpersonal behavior. Again, a facilitator’s ability to successfully help a group will depend on the degree to which the group is willing to be influenced by that person. In other words, our interpersonal conduct will help determine our leadership potential.

Ground Rules

[\[Return to Document\]](#)

The following are several suggested ground rules which a group should consider when beginning a meeting or series of meetings in which participants are expected to participate actively in seeking solutions to well defined problems facing the group. Ground rules govern the way a meeting is run and how the participants participate or interact. In considering ground rules, individuals are free to suggest changes in wording or deletions or additions to the list.

How the meeting will be run

1. Wherever possible, we will make important decisions by consensus (a decision that we can all accept and live with).
2. As much as possible, we will make decisions based on data.
3. We will have all assignments done on time.
4. We will attend all team meetings when possible.
5. We will start meetings on time.
6. We will reserve 5 minutes at the end of every meeting to recap/review the results of the meeting and discuss how to improve the next meeting.
7. The group will decide who will prepare and distribute the agenda for the next meeting.
8. Minutes will be distributed as soon as possible and at least 3 days prior to the next meeting with the agenda for the next meeting. The facilitator may be responsible for distribution.

How the participants will participate

9. We will not take part in sidebars (discussion outside the meeting designed to influence the outcome).
10. We will not react personally to issues or comments.
11. We will be task-focused and will not focus on individuals or on personality issues.
12. We will leave rank at the door.
13. We will always treat information discussed as confidential.

14. Everyone will have a chance to participate.

15. We will not interrupt team members.

16. We will respect others' rights to disagree.

Brainstorming

[\[Return to Document\]](#)

One way to be creative in a group is the brainstorm. Brainstorming is a process which harnesses the experience, perspective and knowledge of each individual in the group to generate information and alternatives which no single individual would have discovered, if left to his or her own devices.

Brainstorming works best under two circumstances. First, those present must have some experience or knowledge which would be relevant to the nature of the question under discussion. For example, it would not make sense to brainstorm a solution to an engineering problem for which the group would not generally be competent to address. Second, there must be a level of emotional comfort among the members of the group before we would expect all to be willing to offer ideas which others might consider outlandish. Generally brainstorming will work best after the group has been together for sufficient time to allow participants to become personally acquainted.

One **variation** from the elements noted below is to allow each person to consider the issues individually before asking any person to offer the first idea publicly. Participants might even write some ideas down before the session begins.

	Element
1	Did I identify to the group the issue that they would be asked to address?
2	Did I help the group choose a recorder?
3	Did I remind the group why the role of recorder was critical to the group's success?
4	Did I remind the group that the recorder's responsibility was to write down every idea as it was suggested?
5	Did I describe to the group the procedure we would use to brainstorm? [You are free to distribute the handout, Brainstorming , for that purpose.]
6	Did I particularly emphasize to the group, before beginning, that when someone offered an idea, the participants should not evaluate the idea?
7	Did I also emphasize to the group, before beginning, that any person could at any point pass when asked for an idea?
8	Did I ask one person to begin the session;? [If the issue is the cause of a particular problem, for example, one person will be asked to suggest a reason -- any reason -- which comes to mind.]
9	After the first person offered the idea, did I ask the rest of the participants if they had any clarifying questions about the meaning of the idea?
10	Did I ask the recorder to write the idea, as it had been presented, on newsprint placed in a location that was visible to all participants?
11	Did I allow the first person to make any corrections to the recorder's entry, if necessary?
12	After completing elements 8 through 11, did I continue by asking a second person – in

	clockwise or counter clock-wise order – to offer an idea, and so forth?
13	After going through the group once, did I start again with the first person and continue in this fashion, going around the group until every person has had as many opportunities to suggest a reason as they have ideas?
14	If any participant began to evaluate an idea, did I identify the comments as inappropriate for this activity?
15	If we had decided to use a timed brainstorming session [e.g., we would continue brainstorming for no more than 20 minutes], did I end the session at the appropriate time?
16	After the group no longer has additional ideas to contribute, did I ask the recorder to go back over the list and ask, with respect to each idea, whether what he or she has written is clear?

Affinity Process

[\[Return to Document\]](#)

Very often when brainstorming, a group's efforts results in a large amount of data which must be organized before it can be effectively evaluated. One way to address that problem is engage in an affinity process. This activity will allow the group to systematically peruse the data and work together to identify duplicate items and, where appropriate, place the many entries in categories of like items.

For example, suppose the issue under consideration is to determine the reasons individuals within a department have failed to respond to customer inquiries in a timely manner. The brainstorming session might generate 25 unevaluated ideas. The affinity process might determine that four of the ideas are duplicates, reducing the total to 21. That same affinity process might also find common relationships among a number of ideas. For example, someone might perceive a relationship between "computer breakdowns" and "antiquated video conferencing equipment." As a consequence, the affinity activity might create a common category – Technical Problems – under which both ideas [and other similar ones] might be placed.

	Element
1	Did I ask the group to write the ideas generated during the brainstorming session on post-it notes?
2	Did I place the post-it notes on a wall or other flat location [e.g., flip chart]?
3	Did I place the post-it notes in a location that was visible to and reachable for the entire group?
4	Did I label an area adjacent to the notes the "parking lot"?
5	Did I randomly sub-divide participants into three groups?
6	Did I ask Group 1 to approach the wall and organize ideas into discrete groups [by moving the post-it notes] and remove any duplicate ideas that existed on the post-it notes?
	Did I establish a time frame within which the Group 1 [and all subsequent groups] would complete its activity?
	If I established time frames, did I enforce the time allotted to Group 1 [and all subsequent groups]?
7	If an idea was determined to be a duplicate, did I ask the group to place it in the parking lot?
8	After Group 1 completed its task, did I ask Group 2 to approach the wall and review Group 1's work?
9	If either Groups 1 or 2 believed an idea belonged in more than one of the groupings, did I allow the group to create a second post-it note to allow them to place the idea in both groupings?
10	After Group 2 completed its task, did I ask Group 3 to approach the wall and provide column titles for the discrete groupings created by Groups 1 and 2?
11	After Group 3 completed its task, did I ask all participants if they had additional insights

	to offer concerning the organization of ideas into groups and/or the group titles?
--	--

Research

[\[Return to Document\]](#)

Sometimes the group needs answers which are truly technical in nature, such as: “Which form must we use when applying for this grant?” “What is the law with respect to affirmative action given the latest Supreme Court decision?”

In these cases the group will first look to itself for an answer. If offered by someone, the next question would be: “What is the basis of your knowledge?” In those circumstances where the group is uncertain about the answer, someone will do research. Sometimes that research will be as little as checking a file. It may require a phone call to a person who has the answer. In more complicated cases it may require someone to search legal or professional journals, using appropriate research methods, to identify the answer.

Again, the group may “brainstorm” the best way to approach answering the question; however, the actual research will depend on a methodology that may require a single person to acquire the data and report back to the team.

	Element
1	Did I help the group identify the issue requiring research?
2	Did I help the group to operationally define the issue?
3	Did I help the group decide who would be responsible for conducting the research, or contacting the person or person’s who would conduct the research?
4	Did I help the group decide the format for reporting the results of the research?
5	Did I help the group decide how the results would be distributed to group members?
6	Did I help the group identify a date by which the person receiving the assignment would report the results?

Voting

[\[Return to Document\]](#)

There are many times during a decision process when a brainstorming activity will have generated a large list of alternatives, most of which will eventually be discarded. Generally we would want to discuss each alternative thoroughly before rejecting it; however, the sheer volume of some lists is so large, it would be virtually impossible to pay that level of attention to every alternative. One way to quickly eliminate those alternatives which are unlikely to represent a desirable choice is to engage in a voting process. This process allows each participant to select a variety of choices he or she believes might be appropriate. The group would decide in advance of the voting the criteria for eliminating items. For example, suppose the group had developed a list of 30 alternatives and each of the 5 members could select any 10 items for continued discussion. We have written all alternatives legibly on several sheets of newsprint, all of which are displayed for each to review. If after the voting, 17 of the alternatives received at least one vote [some, of course would receive multiple votes], we would not continue to assess the 13 alternatives that received no votes.

Element 4 suggests that this tool could allow for weighted voting. That can be accomplished in two ways.

1. Each person might be free to vote for five alternatives, assigning the preferred choice a value of 5, the next preferred a value of 4, etc.
2. Each person might be given a total of 10 votes which he or she can assign to up to 10 items on the list. However, the participant might assign 5 to each of only two items. In order to avoid prematurely reducing the number of alternatives to consider, it is sometimes effective to require each participant to vote for at least 3 items. That would allow him or her to place up to 8 votes on a preferred choice, but still consider at least two other choices.

	Element
1	Did I write a list of all alternatives in a manner that was visible to all participants?
2	Did I help the group determine how many choices each participant was free to identify?
3	Did I help the group determine the method by which each person would illustrate his or her choices?
4	Did I help the group determine the manner in which their votes would be weighted, if at all?
5	Did I help the group identify the criteria for eliminating any alternative prior to beginning the voting process?
6	Did I allow each person adequate time to make his or her selections?
7	Did I tabulate the scores for each item on the list and display them clearly on the newsprint?

Small Group Discussion

[\[Return to Document\]](#)

Small group discussions are particularly useful under two circumstances. First, it is often important early in a decision process to break down interpersonal barriers to participation. Commonly, it is easier for the least vocal persons to express themselves in a smaller rather than a larger group. Therefore, a facilitator might divide a larger group into two or more smaller groups – generally from four to six members – to address an issue as a means of breaking the ice among participants. A second use for small group discussion is to allow another part of the decision process to generate more information than might be developed among all participants in a larger group. For example, you might want to brainstorm possible causes of a problem. If you ask all 10 participants to brainstorm in one large group, the interval of time between which individuals will participate is much larger than in smaller groups. That reduced level of individual participation can result in less focus and, therefore, less group energy.

	Element
1	Did I identify the subject matter that the group[s] should address?
2	Did I explain the significance of the activity?
3	If appropriate, did I identify the relationship of the activity to the group's objective?
4	Did I place participants into groups numbering four to six members?
5	Did I identify the procedure the groups would use in completing the activity?
6	Did I monitor the discussion consistent with the procedure identified in #5, above?
7	Did I ask each group to choose someone to be a recorder and/or spokesperson?
8	Did I circulate among all of the groups without intruding unnecessarily upon the groups' discussion?
9	Did I invite questions as appropriate during the activity?
10	Did I respond to questions as they were asked?
11	Did I end the small group discussion without being hasty or without dragging out the activity? If the discussion was timed, did I end the discussion at the appointed time?
12	If we had decided to use a timed agenda [e.g., we would continue discussion for no more than 20 minutes], did I end the session at the appropriate time?

Large Group Discussion

[\[Return to Document\]](#)

Of all tasks identified in this manual, facilitating the large group discussion is the most common. In fact, it is at this level of involvement that the facilitator will weave into the decision process the other less common activities: brainstorming; affinity; voting; evaluation; etc.

	Element
1	Did I clearly identify the question or issue the group would evaluate?
2	Did I identify why this subject matter was important to the group's objectives?
3	Did I help the group identify the criteria with which we would evaluate the issue?
4	Did I invite participants to comment on that question or issue?
5	If participants did not immediately volunteer to speak, did I direct a question to a particular person?
6	When asking questions, did I use open-ended questions, where possible?
7	Did I allow participants to respond to questions as they were raised?
8	Did I avoid allowing any person to dominate the discussion?
9	Did I end the discussion without being hasty or without dragging out the activity?
10	If we had decided to use a timed agenda [e.g., we would continue discussion for no more than 20 minutes], did I end the session at the appropriate time?

Evaluation Criteria

[\[Return to Document\]](#)

At various junctures a group will need to evaluate the quality of the ideas and or information placed before it. Generally this will take place using a large group discussion format; although, it is often the case that if the group is larger than 6 or 7, the facilitator will initiate evaluation activities in a small group format. After several minutes in the smaller groups, the facilitator will convene all participants to evaluate alternatives together. There are a number of criteria against which alternatives might be considered. We have listed several below.

Control Analysis

Often a large group of alternatives will be peppered with “pie in the sky” ideas over which the group truly has little or no control. If the group identifies such alternatives, then it is in a position to eliminate them from consideration, if only because it would be futile to consider them further.

Wants vs. Needs

Particularly where budget and/or human resources are limited, sorting a list of alternatives by identifying those which are truly needs rather than wants is another way of eliminating alternatives from additional consideration.

Advantages vs. Disadvantages, Costs vs. Benefits

Once a group has developed a list of alternatives which represents ones over which it has some control and are truly representative of needs rather than wants, the group should consider the relative merits of each alternative. Using such paradigms as “advantages vs. disadvantages” or “costs vs. benefits” will allow the group to systematically look at the remaining alternatives from a uniform perspective. Very often an item may be eliminated simply because an honest assessment of “cost” indicates that it is not affordable or a similarly honest assessment indicates that its “advantages” are truly miniscule.

Force Field Analysis

Force field analysis allows a group to consider the various sources either promoting or restraining change in any situation. This analysis will assist individuals in whether to pursue change by emphasizing either an alternative which speaks to its promotion, or, alternatively, seeking to reduce one of the restraining forces which inhibit change.

Developing Consensus

[\[Return to Document\]](#)

Once having collected relevant information which addresses the defined problem, participants must then decide on the one best [or several best] solution. The following is guidance when seeking to develop what we generally characterize as consensus.

1. Consensus is not the majority support for the issue; it is the general agreement by all involved that the result of the deliberations is an outcome all can support in something other than a grudging way.
2. Generally the group should avoid voting inasmuch as traditional voting procedures can result in the removal from consideration of a number of alternatives that might have some support among the decision makers and the continued discussion of which might find additional support from among the rest.
3. In structuring the discussion about the relative value of the various alternatives, groups should consider the following.
 - a. Appointing a facilitator can help keep the group organized and on task. The facilitator can be an existing member of the group.
 - b. A decision on ground rules at the outset of the meeting can also help the group stay on task. For example, it is sometimes very useful to discuss at the outset how the group understands the concept of “consensus” and how the group will judge that it has reached such an agreement.
 - c. Someone might place a copy of the problem definition on newsprint in a manner that will allow constant reference to the agreed upon reason for the negotiation.
 - d. Any weighted voting technique used to weed out an excessive number of alternatives generated by a brainstorming session out be primarily used to exclude only those alternatives for which there is no support. Otherwise, all other alternatives ought be reviewed as noted in the next paragraph.
 - e. Generally, any device that allows more light [i.e., information, ideas, additional alternatives] to shine on the discussion will benefit the group in deciding which alternatives to keep and which to discard. Generally such alternatives might include K-T methodologies, asking participants to lists advantages and disadvantages of any alternative or listing costs and benefits.
 - f. If time permits, it is sometimes useful to break for an evening to allow participants time to consider the issues without the pressure of responding to the scrutiny of others.

Delegating Work

[Return to Introduction](#)

Every office requires the delegation of responsibility. In creating that delegated responsibility we generally believe that the manager must also provide sufficient authority necessary for the successful completion of the task. How the manager determines what to delegate, to whom the delegation ought be made and the terms of the assignment all speak to critical issues associated with the quality of his or her performance as a manager. For example, if someone assigns a very complex task with significant organizational consequences associated with failure to a new employee without requisite skills to accomplish the task, one would doubt the judgement of the manager.

In addition, the manner in which supervisors delegate and provide support for that delegated responsibility are fundamental to creating situations which empower staff in meaningful ways.

	Element
1	Did I have the authority to delegate the task?
2	Was the task I chose to delegate one for which delegation was appropriate?
3	If the task was not routine, did I give the assignment in writing?
4	Did I provide the person to whom I delegated the task with sufficient authority to succeed?
5	Did the person receiving the assignment and I agree on a time frame for the completion of the assignment?
6	Did I give the assignment to someone who was capable of performing the work in question?
7	Did I offer to provide whatever support that person needed in order to complete the assignment?
8	If required, did I actually provide the support when needed?
9	Did I subsequently make myself available to that person where my assistance was required for completion of the assignment?

Communicating Orally

[Return to Introduction](#)

The single most common way in which we interact with others is orally. Most human beings have been given the gift of speech. We are able to both send and receive messages in a variety of ways, most often by speaking.

In this context, we communicate when we send a unit of meaning to another person. We might want to communicate a feeling or a piece of information or a decision. In order to assure that the person with whom we are speaking understand the meaning we intend to transmit, it is important that we be cognizant not only of what we say, but also how we say it.

A person is a leader to the degree that others are willing to be influenced by him or her. How we both send and receive messages is a substantial component in the likelihood that we will be considered as leaders by those with whom we work.

	Element
1	If I initiated the conversation:
a	Did I gain the attention of the person with whom I intended to speak?
b	Did I explain the reason I needed to speak with that person?
2	Did I speak without ambiguity, wherever possible?
3	Did I make eye contact with the person as I spoke?
4	Was my body language and tone of voice consistent with the message I was sending?
5	Did I avoid speaking in a derogatory manner, including the use of sarcasm?
6	Did I avoid using language, metaphors or analogies which are personally offensive?
7	Did I avoid causing unnecessary embarrassment to the person?
8	Did I speak audibly?
9	Did I avoid speaking too fast or too slowly?

Listening Actively

[Return to Introduction](#)

Oral communications is perhaps the single most pervasive way in which we send and receive information from those with whom we work. Active listening is a skill that helps insure that we actually receive the messages which another sends. The skill asks us not only to pay attention to the words that someone transmits, but the other indicators of meaning – body language, tone of voice. Our responsibility is not only to “hear” what the person said, but also to:

- 1] Understand what the person is saying;
- 2] Give that person confidence that we received the message as intended by the sender; and,
- 3] Give that person confidence that we interacted with him or her in a respectful manner.

	Element
1	Did I demonstrate to the person speaking with me that I wanted to listen?
a	Did I remove any distractions and avoid interruptions while the person spoke?
b	If distractions could not be avoided, did I offer to meet with the person at an alternative time?
c	Did I make eye contact with the person who was speaking with me?
d	Did I make other gestures to acknowledge my attentiveness [e.g., facial expressions, hand signals] or make brief comments acknowledging my involvement [e.g., “good point”]?
7	Did I really try to understand the person’s message?
a	Did I set my emotions aside as I listened to the person speak?
b	Did I avoid letting the messenger impact the message?
c	Did I avoid pre-judging the speaker’s motives?
d	Did I avoid mentally arguing with the person as he or she spoke?
e	Did I avoid formulating my response until the speaker was finished?
f	Did I avoid selective listening?
3	Did I allow the person to finish his or her sentence without interruption?
4	If I interrupted, did I catch myself, apologize and ask the person to continue?
5	Did I ask clarifying questions to resolve any ambiguity that might have existed in the words the person spoke?
6	Did I periodically summarize what I believe I had heard the person say in order to confirm I had understood the person correctly?
7	If the person’s body language and other non-verbal communications were not consistent with the words the person spoke, did I ask clarifying questions to resolve any resulting ambiguity?
7	If the person expressed himself or herself in an emotional manner, did I:

a	Continue to make eye contact as the person spoke?
b	Indicate that I understood how the person felt?
c	Avoid telling the person that he or she should not feel that way?
d	Inquire as to why he or she felt that way?
8	When speaking, did I send messages consistent with the standards identified in the competency, " Communicating Orally "?

BRAINSTORMING

[\[Return to Competency\]](#)

When a group of people seek to solve a problem together, it is important to insure that each person will have an opportunity to contribute. There is an old saying which illustrates the need to provide this opportunity: "two heads are better than one". We believe this saying is true.

One way allow two or more heads to work together is to use the concept of "brainstorming" at various times during the problem solving process. To be effective a brainstorming session should occur as follows:

1. The group should choose a recorder, someone to write down every idea suggested, exactly as it is suggested;
2. The group should also choose one person to begin the session; if the issue is the reason a problem exists, for example, one person will be asked to suggest a reason -- any reason -- which comes to mind;
3. After that person has suggested a reason, a second person is given that same opportunity in clockwise or counter-clockwise order and so forth;
4. After going through the group once, start again with the first person and continue in this fashion, going around the group until every person has had as many opportunities to suggest a reason as they have ideas;
5. Not every person will contribute each time it is his or her turn; nonetheless, the next time around something another person has said might stimulate an idea, therefore, no one is disqualified from participating because he or she "passed" one or more times;
6. As the ideas are identified, it is each person's responsibility to refrain from evaluating the idea at that time; no idea will be evaluated until all ideas have been listed;
7. After the group no longer has additional ideas to contribute, the recorder should go back over the list and ask, with respect to each idea, whether what he or she has written is clear; if persons have questions about what the idea is or means the person offering the idea should make an appropriate explanation; remember, it is still inappropriate to evaluate the idea at this time.