

Effective Facilitation – Being a Great Team Leader

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Abstract:

We all like to think we're good at facilitation skills, which are critical skills to leading VE teams. Some believe that facilitation is an "easy" job, but if we really want to ensure quality outcomes from our studies and our teams, much depends on more than the team, but the effectiveness of the facilitator/team leader. This includes work that must be accomplished by the facilitator in the preworkshop phase, not just the workshop phase. The facilitator/team leader role is a very important role to the success of any study, however, it is also very important to continue to grow the viability of value engineering. This paper is about improving facilitation skills by better understanding the roles and responsibilities as well as the many of the skills required.

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Renee is the Managing Partner of RHA, with offices in Seattle and Phoenix and she is a Certified Value Specialist. She is responsible for providing facilitation and training for Partnering, Value Engineering, and Risk Analysis workshops for planning, design, and construction projects, including alternative delivery methods throughout the United States and abroad. Renee has been involved in the built industry for over 30 years. She has most recently provided training and facilitation services in the construction and value engineering field for the past 22 years. Renee has been facilitating partnering workshops for construction and over the years has noticed an escalation of claims which has led her to integrate risk analysis into project planning, design, construction management and value engineering teams. She has helped to develop programs to integrate Risk Analysis in the Value Analysis process as well as a "Risk-Based" Partnering program.

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Paper

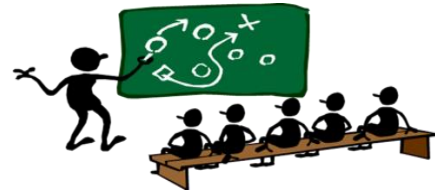
We all like to think we're good at facilitation skills, which are critical skills to leading VE teams. Some believe that facilitation is an "easy" job, but if we really want to ensure quality outcomes from our studies and our teams, much depends on more than the team, but the effectiveness of the facilitator/team leader. This includes work that must be accomplished by the facilitator in the preworkshop phase, not just the workshop phase.

So, what does it mean to be a Facilitator – a facilitator can be defined as:

"Someone who uses knowledge of group processes to formulate and deliver the needed structure for meeting interactions to be effective."

However, there is another term closely tied to the facilitator, which is **Facilitation** – facilitation can be defined as:

“The process where a facilitator guides the group members in a meeting/workshop to share ideas, opinions, experiences, and expertise, in order to achieve a common goal(s) and agreeable action plan.”



Facilitation can be shown in the following framework (Figure 1):



Figure 1

These three dimensions are important to success as represented below:

Process: Process is important, especially with the VE methodology. A great facilitator trusts the methodology. What that means is; often we have changes that occur during a workshop which threatens the “Results”; however, if we will just trust in the methodology, we will obtain the necessary outcomes. However, it is very important to ensure that the client/customer understands the process and we have a role to manage expectations prior to the workshop and during the workshop. There are skills that are needed to be proficient at facilitation. These will be discussed further in this paper.

Relationships: Facilitators can often be multiple things; client managers, coaxers, negotiators, handlers, and one of my favorites is pot stirrer, etc., depending on the team, client and workshop. All of these take skills to manage the relationships to ensure the process works successfully, team members are engaged, and the client knows what to expect. This can often take an interesting balancing act, especially if we are asked to reduce the amount of time we are given to conduct a workshop. But, the

relationships must be maintained if we are to obtain the “Results” we need. Part of the relationship is geared towards **effective team functioning**:

Potential Advantages

Building on each other’s ideas
Different perspectives
Better conclusions/results
Fun/enjoyment
Sharing the load

Potential Disadvantages

Confusion
No agreement
Conflict
No time for individual thinking
Avoiding responsibilities

Results: The VE community has always stated that the process is Results-driven. However, this still has to be managed to ensure that the process will get the team to this destination during the workshop. Also, as mentioned, the client must have provided input into what they need from the VE team. One of the things that is important to ask during the Information Phase of the workshop is for the client to define what the Workshop Objectives are for the team. These are very different from Project Objectives. This is an opportunity to ensure the Relationship and the Process can be managed effectively.

Roles and Responsibilities

Facilitators have several roles and responsibilities especially when speaking of leading teams through the six-step job plan. However there are some very basic ones, including:

- Making everyone feel comfortable and valued
- Encouraging participation
- Increasing understanding
- Listening and observing
- Guiding the team
- Ensuring quality decisions / approaches
- Ensuring that the workshops are results oriented
- Focusing the team on each of the steps in the process

Facilitation Goals

Along with our roles and responsibilities, there are very specific tasks that we must maintain a focus; you could look at these as the goals to achieve through facilitation:

- Keep the team on task
- Ensure the team understands what is expected of them during the pre-workshop, workshop and post workshop
- Clarify confusing discussions
- Ask prompting questions
- Provide feedback to the team and the owner throughout the workshop
- Listen for unfamiliar terms and then ensure they are defined
- Restate issues and discussion to ensure understanding
- Assess the team’s engagement and encourage participation. Encouragement can be expressed in numerous ways (Figure 2):

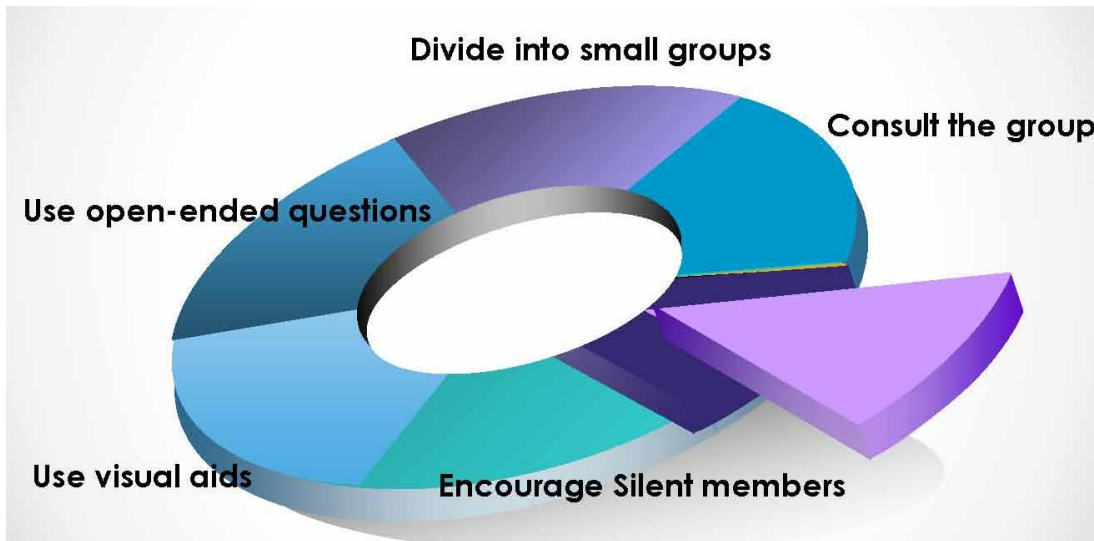


Figure 2

As a facilitator, not only do we have to understand our roles, responsibilities and our focus, there are very specific skills that make a Great Team Leader/Facilitator. Some of those big picture skills that should be focused on at all times, include the following:

- Listen actively
- Continually scan the team / room
- Do not make assumptions
- Check for understanding
- Rephrase responses
- Summarize and recap discussions
- Write it down / appropriate documentation
- Stray from the agenda when necessary; however, be a good time keeper – we are limited in the amount of time we have to assure good outcomes
- Use a parking lot
- Challenge assumptions
- Encourage them to go beyond (creative tension)
- Instill the concept of effectiveness related to your expectations of the team
- Instill the concept of initiative/ accountability / completing tasks as required
- Check in with them throughout the workshop to keep them on track

Facilitators and facilitation skills require some of the following:

Neutrality

- Focus on helping the team to move toward the desired workshop goals and outcomes
- Our role as facilitators is to FACILITATE, not solve problems

Planner

- For some people, facilitation might look easy, but in fact, it is hard work that requires good planning skills
- A facilitator needs to plan things ahead in order to be prepared for the workshop

- The planning skill means being able to understand the team, the client and the problems to be solved and to develop a flexible action plan which helps the team members achieve the workshop goals and objectives
 - Flexibility is key – sometimes we need to make changes on the fly as we realize there is a need for the team to change their focus or approach
- Time management is key to prepare an appropriate agenda and to manage the workshop to ensure that the six-step job plan can be followed
 - As an example, depending on the length of the workshop, function analysis may not include a FAST diagram; the presentation by the project team needs to be adjusted based on the length of time available; a site visit may not be performed; proposals may be condensed and much more focused to only develop a select few; the evaluation process may need to be even more focused to limit the number of proposals to be selected for development, etc.

Energizer

- Facilitation requires ENERGY, be energetic and bring energy to the team. Facilitators must not be inactive or “comatose”
- Being energetic makes it easier for the facilitator to keep people focused and engaged
- The facilitator needs to foster a good attitude and ensure team commitment
- Remember that essentially you are “on stage” at all times
- One of the most difficult things to deal with is what we call the “Dead” team. Energy levels are really low from the team, there is no excitement, and you, as the facilitator, must provide much of the energy for the team. It does happen, and when this occurs, I guarantee, that if you are doing your job and staying energized and keeping the team energized, you will be tired at the end of the day.

Communicator

- Good, no Great, facilitation must include **effective** communication
 - It is your responsibility to help team members reach mutual understanding between themselves throughout the workshop
 - Create and share the right meaning of information
 - A facilitator cares that the team members smoothly communicate with each other and there is no conflict in the team environment. Where this might actually occur might be when there is a combined team; internal and external team members, where feelings and egos might be challenged.
 - One additional element that is very important as a good communicator is the facilitator must communicate effectively with the client to understand their needs and objectives and to manage expectations.

Positivity

- Being positive is an art that requires a facilitator to pro-actively promote an idea, encourage the team and address, not solve, a problem
- This aspect involves a great deal of effort and much energy from an effective facilitator
- An effective facilitator makes the team members want to accomplish the shared goals and to deliver successful outcomes
- The facilitator must always have a positive tone and an active role with the team. You have a job plan to manage in a supportive manner

Professional

- The relationships must be managed; especially if the team includes internal team members with differing job titles; where a boss might be a part of the team. You must help the team members actively participate and eliminate the fear that might exist. People may be afraid to question an idea or comment; our role is to ensure that all team members understand their value as a team member, regardless of their job title. If a “boss” is being domineering and limiting the input from others, the facilitator may need to speak to them off-line to explain the importance of everyone’s participation. This may also require the facilitator to speak to the team member and get them to understand how important they are to the entire team.
- Look for opportunities to ensure that the team has fun and enjoys what they are doing. We want team members to look forward to working on VE teams, not dread it.
- Maintain a strong level of respect for all team members.

Documenter

- Some of us are better than others when it comes to this aspect. As facilitators, one of our roles is to document the things that occur in the workshop, the way they are said, not as you see they should be stated. Sometimes we can help, but make sure with the specific team member that you have not misstated what was said. Especially in a technical arena, sometimes as a facilitator, we may not completely understand what has been stated. Restate what was said to ensure that what you are documenting is correct.
- Some of the things to avoid as a facilitator when documenting what team members are sharing are:
 - Casual ignore
 - Lateral arabesque (you don’t really record anything, you just sort of not and then move on to the next topic.)
 - Diversion – you try and steer away from what is said
 - The Big Put-Down - you as a facilitator should never do this, however, your role as a facilitator is also to keep team members from doing this. This includes being negative about the current project, being negative about the project management and/or the design team.
- This role can be done in several ways;
 - Some facilitators have gone completely electronic. Just make sure that throughout the workshop you are able to have the team refer back to those important aspects such as project goals, constraints, workshop goals, performance attributes, etc. These are important for the team to use as tools.
 - Using flip charts; this is still a strong focus for some. I for one, love to use the “old” fashioned approach. However, the challenge can often be writing legibly. Also, it is important to make sure that you are in a room where you actually have enough wall space.
- The other element of documentation is understanding the expectations of the client regarding the report. Chat with them ahead of time to make sure you are able to capture the appropriate information during the workshop, to provide a valuable post workshop tool. This also supports your role as a Planner.

Conclusion

Effective facilitators learn their skills and practice at being the best that they can be. This does not necessarily come naturally. As has been demonstrated here, we have much that we are responsible for to ensure a successful workshop. Many are already very good at being effective facilitators and great team leaders; however, we can always learn something new and improve upon our own personal capabilities. If we continue to provide successful workshops that deliver quality results, the value methodology will continue to grow and prove that it is an effective methodology. This can only happen if we as team leaders continue to have a positive effect on our workshops and our teams.