

Advanced Facilitation Skills: A 2-day workshop

Developing your skills in facilitating learning groups

Workshop Overview

This programme offers a second stage in trainer training, for those Learning and Development professionals and operational managers who want to improve their skills in facilitating groups in more complex learning situations. Good quality 'process facilitation' is valuable in helping groups with decision-making, problem-solving, innovation, conflict management and long-term team development, and adds value to many project teams and focus groups. This workshop explores the principles and practice of effective group facilitation and offers techniques and processes that are designed to help groups to learn and improve performance.



Workshop Objectives

- **To understand the role of the process facilitator in guiding learning groups to achieve their own desired outcomes**
- **To identify and practise the key skills of facilitation: diagnosis, analysis and movement to action**
- **To learn techniques that help groups to achieve goals through effective problem-solving and decision-making**
- **To develop process review skills in order to help individuals and groups to learn from experience and make appropriate behavioural and structural changes**

Workshop Style

The style of this workshop is highly inter-active and is based on small group practical work, reflection and discussion. The specific interests of the group, and the size of the group, may require the facilitator to apply some flexibility to the programme, therefore the workshop notes here offer a suggested schedule.

This workshop uses the principles which underpin all RSVP Design's training: client-centred, generative, co-operative and problem-based learning, which involves the learners and centres on their needs. Its success is in proportion to the willingness of the learners to share their experiences, challenge each other's ideas and offer input and suggestions.

All RSVP Design trainer training is flexible. This workshop can be tailored to include specific material at the request of the participants and to use their real-life scenarios as case-studies and examples. A personal development process is modelled and used to give the participants their own action plan to take away at the end of the event. Follow-up support may be offered as appropriate.

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Workshop Notes

This 2-day professional development workshop concentrates on key skills of facilitation and explores how to use them in a variety of different contexts. These skills are of particular value to trainers and other learning and development professionals but they are also increasingly in demand amongst Human Resource professionals, line managers and project leaders.

The move from instructor, trainer, teacher, subject matter specialist and mentor to facilitator is a challenging one for many professionals whose career success has been based upon their knowledge and demonstration of expertise. Facilitation requires stepping away from the traditional role of 'expert' and instead becoming expert in 'the art of not knowing'.

Facilitators do not have answers to supply to the people they work with. They are not responsible for providing solutions, fixing problems or generating ideas. However, they are responsible for using their facilitation expertise to create an environment and conditions in which those they work with can achieve these things for themselves. This is the difference between saying, "This is the decision that you should make..." and "You must make your own decision but I will help you to understand and improve your decision-making process."

The key skills that good facilitators use are:

- Observation of individual behaviours and inter-personal interactions
- Active and reflective listening
- Skills of summary, clarification and 'translation' to ensure effective communication
- The choice and formulation of powerful questions
- The ability to confront and challenge whilst retaining a non-judgemental attitude
- Group management, gate-keeping and inclusion
- A focus on action and development planning

Tools and techniques that support this facilitation role include:

- Chairing Skills
- Problem-solving techniques
- Decision-making techniques
- Creative thinking and innovation techniques
- Action planning techniques

In this workshop, the RSVP Design facilitator will be using a variety of roles to maximise the available learning. This will include the RSVP Design facilitator acting at times as instructor and coach as well as demonstrating the facilitation role in action.

In order to generate material to work with, RSVP Design will use the stimulus of practical, team tasks and de-briefs to illustrate group work in action and to rehearse the facilitation skills listed above. However, there will also be opportunities to facilitate discussion groups and to use real-life case studies and scenarios.

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Workshop Timetable: Day 1

0900 - 0910	Welcome and Introductions An introduction to the facilitator and group, domestic arrangements and objectives and style of the workshop.
0910 - 0940	Creation of a learning contract An important part of facilitating a group is to create a 'contract' which puts in place expectations, group operating guidelines and establishes roles and responsibilities. Doing this at the beginning of the programme sets a good model and helps to avoid conflicts that may arise later if expectations have not been addressed.
0940 - 1000	Defining the role of the facilitator Creating a role description and understanding the "Do and Don't" of facilitation
1000 - 1100	Chairing and group management skills Before moving into complex facilitation, it is important to be confident in managing groups, discussions and meetings. Using a practical RSVP Design activity we identify and practise basic chairing skills, to build competence in managing and directing the progress of a group towards an agreed conclusion
1100 - 1120	Break
1120 - 1300	Facilitating decision-making groups RSVP Design's Pressure Point activity is a complex team decision-making task that asks the group to come to agreement over set of options that represent very different priorities and values. Under time pressure, the facilitator must help the group to achieve a satisfactory outcome, to which all groups members can commit. The activity, facilitated by the learners and coached by RSVP Design, is used to introduce decision-making techniques that help facilitators to move groups towards agreement over potentially difficult or controversial topics.
1300 - 1400	Lunch
1400 - 1520	Facilitating innovation or problem-solving groups Facilitators are often invited in to work with groups that have got 'stuck' with a problem or who have run out of ideas and options to help them to move forward. This lively and energetic session explores a variety of ways in which facilitators can introduce creative techniques that encourage the generation of new ideas and new options that may lead to successful problem-solving or create new opportunities.
1520 - 1540	Break
1540 - 1630	Understanding group development and common group process issues Good facilitators often need to be help groups to understand why things are happening to them. Why are we struggling with power issues here? Where is this conflict coming from? Why can't we reach agreement? Why do we never meet a deadline? This session introduces and explores common 'patterns' related to group development, maturity and individual roles that can be useful in explaining and overcoming blocks to progress.
1630 - 1700	Learning Summary A summary of the day and an opportunity for Q & A, follow-up of individual interests and a brief outline of the content of Day 2.

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Workshop Timetable: Day 2

0900 - 0910	Welcome Back A quick reminder of the work of Day 1 and an opportunity to gather any thoughts or observations from the participants. Description of next stage in learning process.
0910 - 1040	Facilitating learning groups: Part 1: Observation, reflection and feedback Using a practical team problem-solving task, the group will divide into 'workers' and 'observers'. The observers will be coached by RSVP Design to observe specific behaviours and processes in the working group, then to structure and prepare feedback for the group following a set of 'good practice' guidelines. This develops the important skills of non-judgemental observation that facilitators rely upon to focus learners on key development areas.
1040 - 1100	Break
1100 - 1230	Facilitating learning groups: Part 2: Learning review and learning application Helping groups to review their experience and to evaluate their own performance is a vital part of the facilitator's role. This session explores a variety of engaging ways of encouraging learners to look back, draw out learning and then consider how to apply this learning in new situations.
1230 - 1330	Lunch
1330 - 1430	Choosing and using great questions The use of effective questions is such a powerful tool in the facilitator's toolkit that it deserves a session to itself! We explore the way in which different types of questions elicit significantly different responses and how we can train ourselves to ask questions that promote different thinking.
1430 - 1515	Using challenge and confrontation Following on from how facilitators use questions, we explore the sensitive area of challenge and confrontation. This is a particularly important skill in addressing conflict, tension and difficult working relationships and can be vital in getting individuals or groups to face up to the reality of a situation they find themselves in. We will explore how to confront in non-threatening ways, in order to help learners to acknowledge difficulties that they may be avoiding or denying, so that they can work through them with a positive mindset.
1515 - 1530	Break
1530 - 1630	Movement to action: development planning Learners will be offered two examples of different types of action plan and will choose one to work with to map out their own development as facilitators. They will then have a personal action plan, plus a methodology they can adapt and use with others as they move to application and action.
1630 - 1700	Learning Summary A summary of the day and an opportunity for Q & A, follow-up of individual interests and a brief outline of on-going support available from RSVP Design.