Facilitation

Introduction

This paper offers an account of how to act as a facilitator when working with groups or teams. It explains the distinctive role of a facilitator and presents concepts, models, tools and practical guidelines for how to play that role.

It is possible to just assume the role of facilitator in the moment, but more commonly, facilitated events, meetings and workshops are designed in advance, and there is a substantial section on the design process and options.

Contents

1 Overview of what facilitation is

Some examples

- Helping a management team decide on its priorities or strategy.
- Supporting a working group developing an action plan.
- Working with a project team to help them analyse and plan the work.
- Helping a leadership team resolve internal conflicts.
- Running an Awayday for all members of a team, unit or even whole organisation which is intended to increase mutual understanding and improve teamworking.

Definition

Facilitation is helping people achieve their objectives by deliberately intervening in the process.

This definition emphasises first of all that facilitation is guided by intended outcomes or goals and that these are generally not determined by the facilitator but by the participants. Actually this immediately raises a problem in that "the participants" seldom have a single set of goals. It is much more common for the facilitator to agree with the leader of a team or group to facilitate a meeting or event and for the other members not to be directly involved in agreeing the intended purpose or outcome.

There are also some situations where the goals of an event are in fact determined by the facilitator. The most common one is probably in consultancy assignments where the consultant runs a workshop to collect data or consult people on possible conclusions or courses of action. However, even in this situation the participants' goals (at minimum, to feel that they have not wasted their time) have also to be taken into account. There will also be a client for this sort of event (whoever is the client for the consultancy project), but unlike the leader of the team or group in the example above, he or she will often not be in the room during the event.

The second main implication of the definition is that a facilitator helps not by contributing ideas and proposals, but by managing and influencing the process by which the group is addressing its task. Further, although there can be a legitimate facilitation role of simply observing a group at work and later giving feedback or observations on how the work was done, facilitation more often involves intervening directly in the process in "real time" i.e. while it is happening.

How does facilitation differ from training? It is primarily a matter of purposes. Generally, facilitation is directed at accomplishing some team or organisational goal, while training is concerned with individuals learning something. However, the differences are not completely clear-cut in that in many facilitation situations the process may result in learning and development for the participants and it is certainly possible to run training events in a facilitative, learner-centred (rather than trainer-centred) way.

The role of a facilitator

In the end, the role depends on what has been contracted for (see below). The core role is usually to:

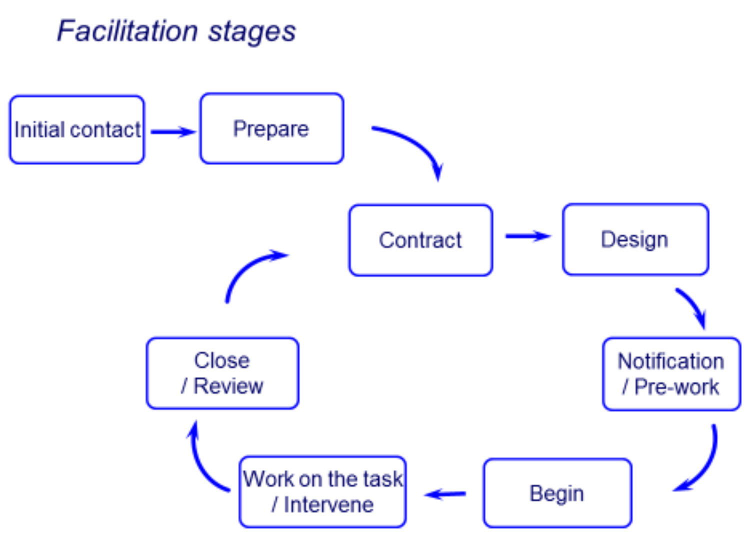
- Manage the process, rather than come up with the ideas.
- Keep the group focused on priorities and outcomes.
- Provide tools and techniques (e.g. of problem solving).
- Promote commitment to the outcomes.

Additionally, it is often the facilitator's role to:

- Design the process for the event and organise preparatory work.
- Develop the group's capability to work together.
- Record conclusions and produce outputs.

The stages in the process

The typical sequence of events is shown in the diagram below.



Initial contact

The starting point is when the idea of facilitating a team, meeting, event, process or whatever is raised between a facilitator and a client. Either party may have initiated this contact.

Preparation

Before having a detailed discussion with the client, the facilitator should ideally collect whatever background information is available on the client's organisation and give some thought to how to handle the situation.

Contract

This is a key stage. The facilitator and client should together agree what is to be done. From the facilitator's point of view, the most important thing is to be clear about the outcomes which the client wants to achieve. Contracting should also cover: time (when and how long), roles and responsibilities, who will attend, etc.

Design

The facilitator needs to design a process which can achieve the desired outcomes within the available time. If the event concerns a management or project team, it can often be helpful to conduct individual interviews with the members before designing the event.

Notification / Pre-work

This clearly depends on the nature of the event. At a minimum, the participants need to know the basic logistics, the subject matter and purpose and perhaps the structure of the event. Some structured preparation is often helpful - perhaps a list of questions to consider - although this can never be wholly relied upon to happen.

Begin

Restate the purpose and intended outcome. Outline your role if this is a new group for you. Some kind of contract must then be reached with the group as a whole. The minimum version of this is simply to check that the proposed outcome and role are acceptable.

It is usually worth then asking people to state their expectations of the event: "What do you want to get out of today?" Write up the answers verbatim on a flip chart, although wild and impossible expectations need to be confronted at the time. These expectations can be revisited at the end of the event.

Additionally, it can be appropriate to either propose a list of desirable behaviours (e.g. Only one person to talk at a time) or to get the group to agree a set of guidelines for how they want to behave. This sot of list should again be written on a flip chart and can be referred to during the event as necessary.

Work on the task / Intervene

This is the core of facilitation - helping the group achieve their objectives. The range of possible interventions is explored later.

Close / Review

Aim to end on a positive note, expressing satisfaction with what has been achieved. It is often appropriate to have a final flip chart listing action points: what has to happen, who will have responsibility, by when. Make sure it is clear what the next steps will be. Check the extent to which the expectations have been met. Review the outcome with the client after the event.

2 Designing workshops and events

Introduction

This section discusses some of the main uses of workshops and events and goes on to consider how to design one.

Four main client groups for workshops and events can be identified: management teams, project teams, managers and staff, and other stakeholders (customers, suppliers, collaborators etc.).

Typical uses

- Strategic planning (the organisation's mission or core purpose, strategies or goals, vision, critical success factors, priorities etc.).
- Defining objectives for change programmes and initiatives.
- Project initiation and review.
- Identification of issues in the early stages of a project which can be investigated more systematically later on perhaps by means of interviews or a survey (this sort of workshop is often called a focus group).
- Data collection as part of a review or other project.
- To present emerging findings or draft recommendations for consultation and discussion.
- For individual development, although except in training events this is often a by-product of the other uses.
- For organisational development: to spread the use of new techniques, methods or concepts.
- For problem solving.
- For team building: to produce a shared understanding of role, future direction etc. and a feeling of belonging and group identification.

Data collection, consultation and problem solving

Such workshops offer a number of potential benefits:

- It is possible to collect the opinions and ideas of quite large numbers of people relatively quickly and easily (much more so than by interviewing them individually).
- New ideas may emerge from the interaction of participants.
- It is a way of increasing the participants' readiness for change by raising their awareness of the issues and of the likely outcomes of the consultancy work.

The main limitations are:

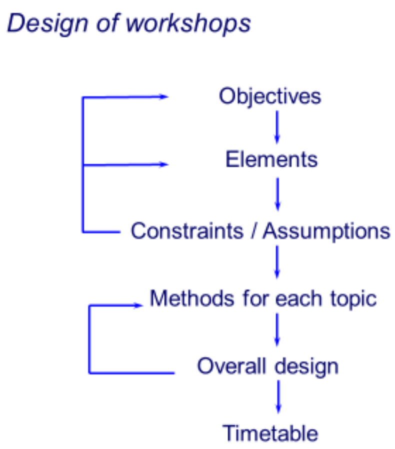
- The discussion may be dominated by a few, possibly unrepresentative, individuals.
- If the participants cover a wide spread of organisational levels, the more junior can sometimes be inhibited by their seniors.
- Each person's contribution is inevitably more superficial than would be the case if they were interviewed individually and there is less scope to explore the underlying thinking.

The issues raised by this sort of workshop are:

- Coverage: what groups of staff should be involved.
- Selection: who should actually attend, since most often it is not practicable to involve all members of the target groups.
- Composition: whether to have homogeneous or mixed groups.
- Size: there is no general guideline here. Successful workshops can be run with as many as 100 people or as few as three. Clearly the preferred size depends on what you are trying to achieve and once determined constrains the approaches which can be taken.
- Trust: the general experience is that most people are pleased to be invited to workshops but some doubt that their views will actually be taken account of .

Designing workshops

The main steps in designing a workshop are shown in the diagram below.



The starting point is of course the objectives: what are you or your client trying to achieve and, closely linked to that, who is the target population.

This will usually suggest the main topics or areas the workshop should try to cover. If these seem too numerous or disparate, the objectives may need to be revised.

It is important then to explicitly identify the constraints. Typically these will include: accommodation and facilities, resources, timescale, duration, numbers, availability of key people, etc. These too may suggest that the objectives need to be revised or fewer topics covered.

A way of working on each area or topic can then be considered. The next section lists the main design options which are commonly used in workshops.

Now it is possible to construct an overall design and then a timetable. Individual session designs may need to be modified if insufficient time is available or if the process of the workshop as a whole seems too repetitious or otherwise unsatisfactory.

Finally, it must be recognised that all workshop designs have to be flexible enough to cope with unexpected overruns, problems and changes. Many workshops are only run once and so cannot be pre-planned with absolute precision. A series of workshops will normally be found to settle into a pattern after the first one or two.

Design options for workshops

A range of possible processes can be used when designing workshops. The options can be combined in various ways and are not completely self-contained.

Presentation

Provide information about the organisation, proposed strategies or changes, external developments, the consultancy project, a particular problem area, interim findings or draft recommendations. It is vital to include an opportunity for questions.

Alternatively, outline some concepts, methods or tools which are to be applied to the subject under consideration.

Pose questions

The facilitator may pose questions to the whole group in a plenary session; in syndicate to the whole group or individual members. Answers are typically written up on a flip chart (it is vital to use the exact words as far as possible). The main danger is degenerating into "guess my list".

Whole group discussion

This is more open-ended than posing questions. It may be inconclusive unless brought together with a summary or punch line. Can provide an opportunity to let off steam or for relief from intensive work.

SWOT analysis

Identification of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats associated with the present state, with alternative options (e.g. implementation methods). Can be done as a whole group / syndicate / individual task.

Syndicate discussion task

Identify priority areas, key issues, etc. Reporting back to the main group can either be done by: each syndicate in turn (can get boring if findings are similar); each syndicate only reporting additions / differences to the previous ones or by each syndicate posting findings round room and all moving around.

Discussion in trios / pairs

Essentially a variation on syndicate discussion but often used as "buzz groups" i.e. within a plenary group. Sometimes developed as the 1:2:4:8 or cohort building process: each person thinks on their own and writes down their view, then discuss in pairs to come up with a joint view, then in fours, then in eights etc. until ultimately two versions are presented in plenary being the culmination of the whole groups' views. Often used to develop the core purpose or mission of the group when you want everyone to contribute.

Brainstorming

Identify possible courses of action or solutions to a problem. Done in whole group if not too large or in syndicate groups. The process is described in more detail in a separate handout.

Task

Map organisational processes, design jobs, structures or systems, reach decisions, solve problems. This is usually best done as a syndicate activity.

Metaplan / talking wall / hexagons

Pose a question (e.g. how could we improve cross-functional working?). Each individual writes answers on post-it notes, cards or even magnetic hexagons (one answer on each one, up to a limit of say three or five, preferably written in capitals). The cards are displayed on a wall for all to see and then are rearranged into clusters around common themes or issues. It is best to insist that participants do this, rather than taking on the task yourself. The issues or topics can then be allocated to sub groups to develop further, prioritised or processed in other ways.

Completion of instruments and questionnaires

For example, the Belbin team roles questionnaire or the Myers Briggs Type Indicator. Usually these are completed individually and results are shared and discussed. An input on the theory may be required. Some instruments may only be used by licensed practitioners.

Influences on the overall design

The sequence of topics needs to have a sense of progression and an overall logic, rather than as often happens appearing to be a rag bag of unconnected elements.

It is highly desirable to vary the methods so that participants experience variety and stimulation rather than repetition and boredom.

The event should be designed with an overall “dynamic”. This is a hard concept to describe exactly but it relates to the feeling of energy and achievement which an event needs for success and which is bound to ebb and flow during the course of the event. One particular dimension concerns when to design closure into the process and when issues can be left open. The relative pace of sessions is another.

Finally, the constraints of time and resources relative to the number of people involved have to be taken into account.

3 Content, process and intervention

Once you have designed your event, you need to be able to run it. To have any chance of being effective as a facilitator you need to be able to distinguish between content and process, and to be able to intervene in and influence process.

The basic distinction

Content is what is being addressed - the subject or task.

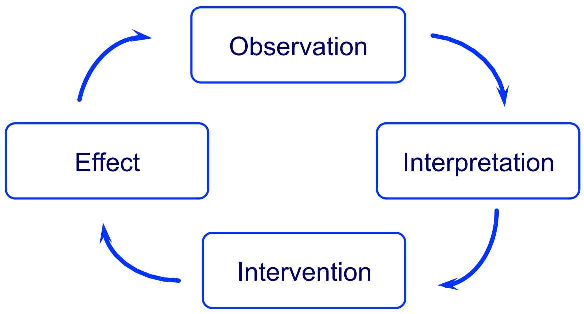
Process is how the task is being tackled, what is going on.

Both are there to be observed and dealt with all the time in human interactions.

The intervention cycle

The best way to facilitate or influence an interaction is usually to address the process level. The process of **intervening** (any deliberate action by a facilitator, or indeed by anybody else) can be described by the model shown below:

The intervention cycle



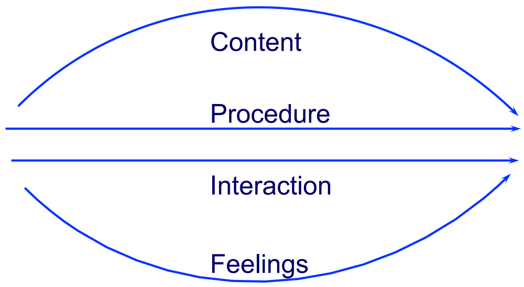
This suggests that the first step is to accurately observe what is going on and then interpret or diagnose what it means. Many people do not clearly distinguish between these two processes and will present their interpretations as if they were facts. This is dangerous and can lead to inappropriate interventions being made. In the light of the interpretation it is possible to make an appropriate intervention (if one is needed) which will have some sort of effect. The effect in turn will need to be observed and interpreted and may lead to further intervention.

To make this cycle work you need to have a way of describing and diagnosing what is going on. The model below divides the process dimension into three components: procedure, interaction and feelings.

The levels model

The idea of levels suggests increasing emotional intensity, increasing difficulty and risk of addressing directly and a need for an increasingly strong relationship before this can be easily done. Although presented separately, the levels are interdependent.

Levels of interaction



Procedure	Interaction	Feelings
The agenda Formal roles Structure used to guide the discussion Groundrules Basis of decision making Review process	How often people speak What kind of interventions they make Who talks to whom Who is listened to Who is ignored or interrupted Who is silent	Overt and indirect expressions of emotion about the subject matter, the process or the other participants.

Using the model in a group or meeting

Level	Indicators that things are going well	Indicators of problems
Content	Clear and agreed goals Contributions are to the point Building and summarising	Rambling Repetition Going round in circles Several topics under discussion at once Difficulty reaching a decision
Procedure	Explicit agenda Agreed process which is followed Keeping to time allocation Decisions being reached Roles are clear	Manifested at the other levels
Interaction	Everybody contributes Contributions are listened to and responded to	Interruptions Overtalking A few people dominate Non contribution Side conversations
Feelings	Relaxed atmosphere Humour Feeling of achievement and progress Appropriate degree of openness about feelings	Emotional outbursts Sulking Indirect aggression

Intervening

If you are dealing with somebody who is at the feelings level, you need to intervene at the same level. This does not mean giving vent to your own feelings, although disclosing your own feelings can be appropriate, but rather acknowledging or exploring the other's feelings.

If a group is stuck, either:

- intervene at the procedure level to propose a different way of addressing the content, or
- intervene at the level **below** where they are stuck.

4 Practical guidelines for facilitating a group

This section offers a repertoire of commonly used interventions. Of course, not all are appropriate in every situation. All should be used with a clear intent and with consideration of the appropriate delivery and timing.

Describe the purpose or desired outcome

Begin the discussion by clearly stating what the purpose is, or what you hope to achieve: to identify the causes of a problem, to seek views on a proposal, to identify the most appropriate course of action, etc.

Ensure the task is clear and acceptable

Discover and write up people's expectations. Check that everybody understands the task and is willing to address it. Make sure everybody is starting from the same level of knowledge. Ensure that the scope and boundaries of the task are clear and that any assumptions you are making are explicit.

Provide information

This may be appropriate in the early stages, and at other key points, but needs to be handled with great care. It is easy to overdo. If challenged, be careful to avoid becoming defensive.

Structure the discussion

This may be no more complicated that identifying the problem before discussing the solutions or generating a set of options before seeking to choose between them. Proposing and then helping people stick to such a structure can be profoundly helpful.

Ask questions

Questions need to be relevant, clear and fairly specific. If you think you already know the answer, beware of getting into the situation where you are playing "guess my list": be open to the possibility of novel points of view.

Clarify individual contributions

Check that you have understood what people are really saying and why. Listen for the real meaning and significance. Be prepared to probe their comments with supplementary questions.

Summarise the discussion

Draw together individual comments: “so, we are saying that the main problem is ......”. This gives a feeling of progress and achievement and is a very good way of maintaining control.

Manage the interaction

Notice who is not contributing and draw them in - most easily by asking them directly. Notice who is trying to speak but can’t get in and help them in : “I think you wanted to say something there, Fred”. Try to contain those who talk too much: “Thank you Jim. Now, what do other people think?”. (Other techniques: direct questions to other members, set a time limit for contributions, establish a rule so that “no one can speak twice until everyone has spoken once” etc.).

Provide direction

Normally this will be at the content rather than process level. Identify key issues and conclusions, propose ways of resolving or taking forward issues, extract actions and decisions.

Provide feedback

It can be helpful to draw attention to patterns of behaviour exhibited by individuals or by the group as a whole. Try to do so in a descriptive rather than judgemental way.

Confront and challenge

This may concern inconsistencies and contradictions e.g. “It seems to me that some of us are saying X and others are saying Y - which is it?” Try to discover the basis for the disagreement. It may also be necessary to confront inappropriate behaviour.

Provide support and affirmation

Show acceptance of people’s views and contributions. (This does not necessarily mean agreeing with them of course.) Build on and link what people say. Encourage and support both individuals and the whole group if things get difficult.

Keep a record

Recording points made on a flip chart is one of the easiest ways, but be very careful to use the exact words rather than rewrite it in your jargon or language.

5 Practical techniques

This section reviews a range of practical techniques which can be used when facilitating workshops and team events. Some will have been part of the design and others may form part of your repertoire to be used when the occasion seems right.

Expectations exchange

This is worth including as the first activity in many workshops. Typically you outline the aim and intended outcomes of the event as you see them and then ask the participants: "What do you want to get out of this event?"

There are two reasons for wanting to do this: you find out what people are looking for and therefore have more chance of meeting their needs; they feel more optimistic that the event will respond to their needs.

Some guidelines:

- It is usually preferable to do this as a free for all: people just shout out what they think. Going round the group is too mechanical and uncomfortable.
- Write down what is said verbatim on a flip chart, but test and clarify anything which is ambiguous or unclear.
- Be prepared for an initial pause while people gather their thoughts – but usually there is a flood of ideas thereafter.
- Confront any impossible or unrealistic ideas, but only when all suggestions have been gathered.

Ground-rules

Another early activity is often to agree ground-rules covering "How we are going to work together". For example:

- One person speaking at a time (no side conversations).
- Say what you mean and mean what you say.
- Speak personally: "I", not "We", "You", "It", "They", etc.
- Headlines not details.
- Give examples and specifics if it would be helpful.

This creates useful expectations in the participants' minds and provides the facilitator with an easy basis to intervene if they are not followed. However, some groups find the process uncomfortable and artificial.

You can either put forward some draft ground-rules and invite people to add to or amend them or put up a blank sheet and invite suggestions.

Using non-verbal interventions

- Vary the pace and pitch of your voice to increase impact and generate energy.
- Move between sitting, standing and in-between (e.g. sitting on the edge of a table or arm of a chair).
- Move into and out of the group.
- Focus your attention on individuals as a way of encouraging and supporting them (and temporarily shutting out others).
- Use small hand movements to encourage and inhibit contributions.

Using a flip chart

- Stand directly facing the flip chart.
- Don't worry about turning your back on the participants, but write as quickly as you can to minimise the time you are looking at the chart.
- Write a heading on the chart.
- Start a new page for each new topic.
- Capture the points in a way which is intelligible for later reference and accurate (use the participants' own words as much as possible).
- Write in lower case rather than capitals (it's quicker).
- Don't unthinkingly write **everything** down: check that it is relevant to the task in hand.
- Issues that belong outside the meeting or later on can be parked on a separate flip chart (an "issues log" – see below).
- Work with what you have written up wherever possible, rather than just moving on to write up some more stuff..

Running breakout group sessions

Briefing

This should typically cover:

- The task in clear and unambiguous terms.
- The reasons for doing the task - the purpose or value. (This may be obvious.)
- The outputs to be produced.
- Methods to be used. (If appropriate.)
- The time available.
- Possibly how long is intended for the report back.

The briefing should be written down. Flip chart remains the preferred method in most circumstances because it is the most flexible, but paper and Powerpoint slide are alternatives.

Check out

Give the groups a few minutes to get settled then check out that they are clear what they are doing and have no problems. You may want to sit in and observe for a while. Only intervene if it is obvious that the syndicate has misunderstood the task, if there are obvious signs of problems at task or process level or if you are asked to.

Manage the report-back

There are two main options for reporting back. The most common is that the spokesperson of each group in turn presents their work. The other alternative, which is often appropriate in workshops which are reviewing proposals (e.g. a new work process) or engaged in design activities is that all the outputs are posted up and addressed by theme, with each contributing its views on each issue as it arises. This section offers some pointers on both methods.

Presentations

Ensure that each group has an equal opportunity to present a report of its work. Manage the time so that enough is left for the last group. Don't let presenters get away with "the other groups have said it all" as an excuse to avoid making a proper report-back.

If several reports are to be heard addressing the same issue the second and subsequent presenters can be encouraged to focus on the parts of their presentation which cover new ground or disagree with what has gone before.

To maintain the energy level during report-backs, ask questions. Keep everybody on their toes by questioning things which are vague, ambiguous, incomplete or just plain wrong.

Post up and discuss

Post up all flip charts or all those which address the first main issue. Spend a few minutes trying to ensure you can see a logical sequence of how to work on the issue and which groups have points to be discussed (usually not all groups will have points on everything).

Work through in sequence, asking groups to speak as appropriate, crossing off points as they are covered and usually recording conclusions and unresolved issues on other flip charts. This process is much more interactive that the simple presentation and will involve some periods of whole group discussion on particular issues.

Close

This will usually involve making a link to the next session or indicating what will happen to the products of this one.

Prioritising a list

- Vote: go through each item and ask the whole group to vote for it, perhaps limiting the number of items each person can vote for.
- Vote: ask each person in turn to identify their top three (say) priorities.
- Ranking: each person ranks the items in priority order (1 to n). Go though each item in turn and add up all the individual rankings for that item. The item with the **lowest** total score has the highest priority.

- Give each person a number of points (typically 10 or 100) to apportion between the items. There may be constraints about how they are apportioned (e.g. all items have to have some, a maximum which can be allocated, etc.).

- Post up a list and invite participants to tick their top three or stick a star against them. Unlike most of the other options, this allows individuals to take others' preferences into account as they express their own.

- Open discussion to achieve consensus. Working with items and seeking to reconcile and consolidate them.

Issues log

This is nothing more complicated than a running list of issues to be deal with later (in the workshop or outside it) which is maintained on a flip chart, typically posted on the wall of the meeting room.

The great advantage is that things which cannot be resolved by the people in the room, or which come up in some way at the wrong moment, are visibly acknowledged and not forgotten. They are however put out of the way which allows the current discussion to move forward.

Guidelines:

- Write them down accurately and precisely so that people are happy their issue has been correctly captured and so that it will be clear later what was meant.

- Make sure to revisit the issues log when developing next steps (see below).

Write it down

A good technique for accelerating progress during a group discussion is to pause the discussion and ask everyone to write down their individual answers to the question under consideration. The options are then:

- The discussion can then resume.

- Each individual can say what they thought (perhaps with answers being charted up).

- The written answers can be circulated around the room, or posted up, and silently shared.

Next steps and action points

Ensure that everything on the issues log is made into an action point – even if it is as crude as "Resolve the issues".

For each action seek to make it clear what has to be done, by whom, by when. A flip chart with three columns is ideal for recording this.

Dealing with difficult people

E.g. those who are verbose, silent, angry, sad, sullen, cynical, disruptive.

- There is no universal solution to any of these situations – the following points are offered as general guidelines.
- Apply the intervention cycle especially carefully – be clear about what is observation and what is you interpretation of it; be tentative in your interpretations.
- All these behaviours will have to be explicitly acknowledged or confronted before they can be fully dealt with. e.g. “I can see you feel strongly about that.” “You don’t seem too happy about what is going on”. “I notice you are always late.”
- It is often appropriate then to explore what is producing the behaviour: the underlying feelings, concerns or whatever.
- If the feelings are widely shared in the group, there is no point in trying to progress the task until they have been fully aired and dealt with as afar as possible.
- Distress should be accepted and legitimised. Give the person the option of going on or taking a break.

6 Six categories of intervention

Section 3 described intervention in terms of content and process, related to levels of interaction. A more powerful and sophisticated understanding of how to intervene is offered by John Heron's Six Category model. [For a full account of six category intervention analysis, see John Heron - Helping the client (Sage Publications, 1990)]

Introduction

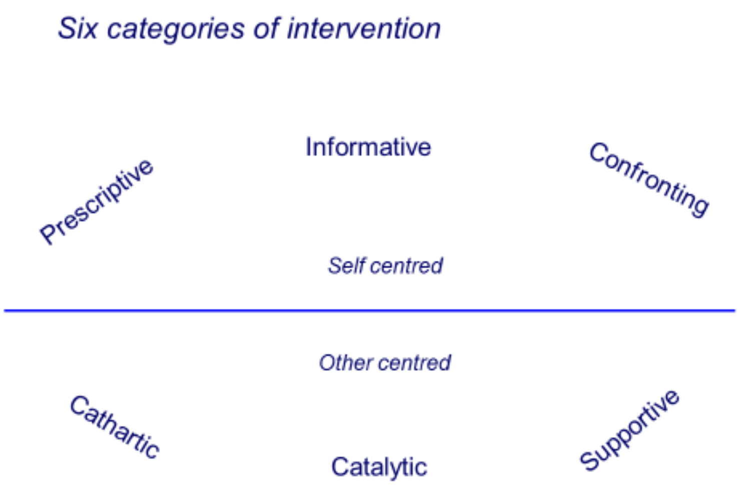
Six category intervention analysis can be described simply as a communication model which can be used in any situation where one person is interacting with another e.g. line manager to staff member, consultant to client, bank manager to customer. The model can be applied very effectively to interventions in meetings and groups.

An intervention

An "intervention" in this sense is an identifiable piece of verbal and/or non-verbal behaviour that is part of a practitioner's (e.g. a manager or consultant) interaction with or service to another person or group.

The six categories

The six categories of intervention are described below. They are defined more by the intention with which they are used, than by any particular form of words.



Authoritative

Prescriptive seeks to direct the behaviour or thoughts of the client. It covers a range of possibilities from direct order to tentative suggestion.

Informative seeks to impart knowledge or add information.

Confronting seeks to raise awareness of limiting attitudes or behaviour which have negative effects.

The first three are labelled "authoritative" because they are largely practitioner-centred: providing instruction, guidance and raising awareness.

Facilitative

Cathartic seeks to enable the other person to deal with painful thoughts or emotions. These may be being expressed directly or indirectly (e.g. non-verbally).

Catalytic seeks to promote learning and problem solving, elicits information and helps with diagnosis.

Supportive seeks to affirm the other person's qualities, feelings, wants, actions and ideas.

The second set of three are called "facilitative" because the practitioner is seeking to enable the other person (or people) to become more autonomous and to take responsibility. In that sense they are more other-centred.

Key points about the categories

- One set of three is neither more or less useful than the other. To some extent the label "facilitative" is misleading because in many cases a person or situation will be "facilitated" by making an authoritative intervention (in a crisis, if the person lacks experience or knowledge etc.). It all depends on the practitioner's role, the needs of the other person and the context.

- It is a working model not a dogma. The **intention** of the practitioner will determine the selection and outcome of an intervention, not a particular form of words or mechanical analysis.

The interventions

Some of the most common types of intervention appropriate to organisational life are given below. To repeat, the key point about categorising interventions is the intent with which they are used rather than the form of words. So, although catalytic interventions for example are often phrased as questions, most other interventions can also take the form of a question.

Prescriptive

Command (or order).
Proposal.
Negotiated agreement.

Informative

Presentation of facts, knowledge or technical models.
Interpretation of behaviour.
Non-evaluative feedback about a process, a system or a piece of work.

Confronting

Direct negative feedback, uncompromising but owned for what it is: subjective impressions.
Direct question e.g. are you aware that ...?
Correction of inaccuracies, generalisations or challenge to rigid opinions.

Cathartic

Attention and listening.
Asking the other person to describe a specific incident rather than talking in abstractions or generalities.
Asking the other person to literally describe incidents.

Catalytic

Attention and listening
Questioning - open / closed.
Reflecting - simple / selective.
Empathetic building.
Checking for understanding / summarising.

Supportive

Attention and listening
Affirmation person to person of ideas or attitudes.
Validation of work on a project.
Acceptance, acknowledgement of help needed or offered.

Notes about the interventions

The skilled practitioner can move from one to another as the situation demands.

- A valid intervention is the right one in the right category in the right manner.

- A degenerate intervention is one that is misguided rather than malicious and generally comes in one of four forms: unsolicited, manipulative, compulsive or unskilled.

- Cathartic interventions need to be labelled “handle with care” - they need emotional competence on the part of the practitioner and can produce a powerful response. In most instances it will be enough just to listen in a calm and supportive manner.

- The interventions suggested are by no means exhaustive, they are examples which would seem to be appropriate in an organisational context.