

Facilitation – A key tool for project success

The essential projects we undertake as a part of our everyday work, whether setting up a new children's centre or organising the waste recycling for an area, all involve groups of people working together. These people are often from diverse backgrounds, with different interests and capabilities. Successful projects need people to develop effective working relationships and a sophisticated level of communication extremely quickly. In this case Facilitation becomes an invaluable tool for project success.

Our usual way of getting people together is through meetings. You are probably familiar with meetings that go on and on, accomplish less than expected and maybe even cause more problems than they solve. But ineffective meetings waste more than just time; they may lose the co-operation of the very people needed for the success of the project by making them feel frustrated, confused or undervalued.

Take a second to estimate the cost of your last meeting, by multiplying the duration of the meeting by the number of participants and their payroll cost. The result may be surprising. It would be easy to waste thousands of pounds on a single unsuccessful meeting alone. This has led to many blue-chip companies and small to medium-size enterprises alike recognising the need to improve this aspect of their day-to-day business practice and has catapulted Facilitation skills to the top of the agenda.

What is facilitation?

Facilitation is an approach to running effective meetings. A trained 'facilitator' leads the meeting in the style of a workshop, where all participants can contribute equally and are empowered to work towards a clear objective. The facilitator is like a referee, acting impartially and ensuring that all 'players' are given the opportunity to contribute and the 'game' keeps its focus and objective. The objective of a workshop may be a set of ideas; a project plan; an implementation strategy or even just a group of people agreeing on a way forward. The carefully selected participants are chosen for their knowledge and skills in relation to the objective and are given the authority to act in the workshop situation. It is the facilitator's role to manage the process of the workshop, without being directly involved in the content. Through their knowledge of facilitation techniques, they are able to ensure that all members of the group can perform to the best of their abilities in an environment where they feel safe to collaborate.

Benefits of facilitated workshops

Well-facilitated workshops achieve their objectives, by involving the right people and increasing group effectiveness; they save time by employing the right process to allow movement towards the objective; they save money by getting the best from the most expensive part of a meeting - the participants.

Getting started

Effective facilitation is not easy, but there is a lot of support available if you know where to look. There are a number of independent bodies that offer advice and accreditation, including GlobalFn and the International Association of Facilitators (IAF). If you would like to develop your own facilitation skills or introduce facilitated workshops within your organisation, an advisor at TCC Training and Consultancy (01477 500 011) will be happy to help. You can even get started right away by attending a training course in facilitation

techniques. A typical event, such as TCC's 'Workshop Facilitation Techniques' will last two days and covers everything you need to start facilitating your own workshops, improve collaboration in your team and get those important projects moving in the right direction.

For further information, please contact:

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