

Coach as Facilitator

Overview

Purpose

The purpose of this module is to present an overview of the major roles of the coach as facilitator and to provide an opportunity for participants to practice facilitation skills.

Objectives

At the end of this module participants will be able to:

- Define facilitation.
- Demonstrate a four step approach to group process intervention.
- Discuss six facilitation guidelines.
- Assess the degree of self-knowledge they have regarding their role as coach.

Content

- What is Facilitation?
- Making Process Observations
- Effective Questioning
- How to Give Feedback about Group Process
- Facilitation Guidelines
- Self-awareness

What is Facilitation?

Definitions

As a facilitator, a coach will:

- Assist with team building.
- Observe group processes and intervene to address issues of group behavior.
- Give and receive feedback.
- Assist with decision making, conflict management, conducting effective meetings, managing change, enhancing creativity, and communicating with the organization.

Schwartz (1994) defines group facilitation as “a process in which a person who is acceptable to all members of the group . . . intervenes to help a group improve the way it identifies and solves problems and makes decisions, in order to increase the group’s effectiveness.”

This module focuses on how a coach observes and intervenes in group process. Group process refers to how a group works together, in contrast to content, which refers to what a group is working on (such as IMCI or TB diagnostic criteria).

The facilitator's interventions strengthen the team and result in team members learning the skills of facilitation.

For example:

- A skillful facilitator can ask the right questions and prevent the team from going off on tangents.
- The facilitator can mediate problems between individuals and help people see where they are blocked.
- The facilitator can identify areas where further training would be helpful.

Until a team develops its own body of skills, it is unlikely that high productivity can occur without at least some help from a facilitator to assist them as they learn to work together and acquire new abilities and responsibilities.

Making Process Observations

By observing team activities and helping members reflect on what is happening, facilitators help the team become aware of its behavior and become more productive.

After the team has organized itself and begins to understand its mission and objectives, it will pass through the usual stages of development - forming, storming, norming, performing, (and closing, if relevant). Facilitation interventions will reflect an understanding of the stages of team development. For example:

- At the first few team meetings the coach may observe that the leader is making all the decisions without input from the team. The coach may talk with leader outside the meeting and devise a strategy for encouraging team members to participate more actively.
- When a new member joins a team, a coach may observe that progress stalls. The coach supports the team by suggesting introductory and orientation activities. He or she could review the team goals, objectives for the specific meeting, the history of the team's work to this point, and do warm-up or introductory exercises.
- A coach may observe that a team is spending considerable amount of time in the storming stage arguing over how to proceed with their tasks. He or she may suggest clarifying the differences of opinion and encouraging a decision reached by consensus. Alternatively, he or she may suggest a team building exercise that results in establishing norms.
- A coach may observe that team members seem a bit indifferent to each other and rarely acknowledge one another for their unique skills and knowledge. To enhance team building and high

performance, a coach may “model” providing supportive feedback to each team member or suggest that an evaluation take place at the end of meetings to provide supportive feedback.

- During the norming stage, a coach may notice that the team is consistently agreeing with each other without critical examination of various points of view. A coach may comment on this observation and encourage the team to continue expressing different ideas. Alternatively, a coach may make a provocative statement to stimulate disagreement.
- When the team is in a high performing stage, they may require no facilitation at all.
- A coach may encourage the team leader to schedule special meetings at the completion of major tasks to celebrate and review accomplishments and assess what worked and what didn't.

Effective Questioning

Facilitators often make their interventions in the form of a question. The primary purpose of questioning is to encourage people to **think**. An amazing thing occurs when a question is asked. Even after a person answers a question, the brain continues, unconsciously, to process alternatives to the answer. Questions generate sustained, enriching brain activity.

For example: A person may initially give a particular response to a question; however, given time and without any additional questions, the respondent will often seemingly change his or her mind, and give another answer. This is evidence that the brain continues to dwell on a question, even after an initial answer is provided. So, be patient with team members and don't react to each response. Team members will continue to think creatively after they have provided their initial answer.

Questioning is a powerful tool for effective communication, facilitation and training. Questions may be used to promote team and individual self-awareness and problem solving. Questions may be used to stimulate thinking and discussion. Effective questioning can provide improvement coaches information regarding how well their facilitation and training interventions are being received.

The goal of teambuilding is to help the team solve its own problems and to be responsible for their actions. Asking questions in such a way that the team figures out what to do is highly desirable. Questions that encourage and even force the team to be responsible and take the initiative will become part of a skilled facilitator's repertoire of tools.

A caution to coaches about the use of questions: do not play a guessing game with the team. New facilitators or trainers typically ask questions until the group figures out the “right answer.” The recipient of that type of questioning reacts in frustration, wishing the facilitator would just say what

it is he or she is thinking.

In order to encourage dialogue, debate, and problem solving, questions are best asked when you don't know what the answer is or if you don't know how the respondent will answer the question.

How to Give Feedback About Group Process

Set Ground Rules

When you establish ground rules with the team and team leader, plan for **how** you want to give feedback. Sometimes coaches agree to brief the team leader after the meeting about ways that the leader could take action to build the team. This maintains the leader's role of being in charge of team activities. At other times, the team or team leader agrees that the coach should speak up directly in the meeting.

It does not matter which method is used – speaking up directly during a meeting or speaking through the leader. In either case, giving feedback must be:

- Supportive of the team leader.
- Supportive of the team.
- Focused on the goals.

Four-Step Approach to Group Process Intervention

When intervening in group process, it is often useful to use the following 4-step approach. This approach relies on skills in observation, active listening, providing constructive feedback, and asking effective questions.

This approach presumes that a team's ground rules are that the coach may provide feedback directly.

Step 1: Give the team feedback on the observed behavior.

“When the leader stated that she believed everyone supported improvement C, I noticed that some team members exchanged what appeared to me to be puzzled glances.”

Step 2: Describe the potential or actual effect of the behavior.

“As you know without true consensus we may have trouble implementing the solution.”

Step 3: Ask the team for input.

“Is there something else that needs to be discussed or is there consensus?”

Step 4: Decide on action.

“What would the team like to do now?”

As you can see, open-ended questions posed to the team by the coach can serve to bring a team back on track or can flag issues the team has not addressed. Examples of such open-ended intervention questions are listed below.

- “What criteria are the team using to make this decision?”
- “How does the team want feedback on time from the timekeeper?”
- “What process will the team use for making this decision?”
- “What would be some next steps that team members could take before the next meeting?”

In addition, a coach should intervene in a way that allows both the team leader and the members to learn from it so that they will be better able to deal with similar situations in the future. The most likely occasions when a facilitation intervention by the coach will be needed are:

- To enhance understanding with probing questions.
- To enhance understanding with on-the-spot feedback.
- During problems with the decision-making process.
- During times of conflict.

Individual behavior

Even when there is no apparent conflict within the team, some individual behaviors can disrupt or even prevent good team functioning. It is important to learn how to respond in such situations in order to help the team accomplish their objectives. The following table describes some specific difficult behaviors and ways to deal with them.

TO HANDLE...	TRY THIS...
No response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summarize main points. • Invite reactions from other team members. • Ask questions related to earlier discussions.
An overly talkative team member	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paraphrase the ideas of the team member to close the discussion. • Invite others to respond. • Direct discussion to another member. • Ask the member to summarize the major points of the discussion.
Quiet team members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summarize main points of discussion frequently to clarify understanding. • Note changes in the facial expression of quiet member. Ask questions to elicit participation. • Have team members respond in writing and ask the quiet member to read his or hers aloud.
Members who raise irrelevant issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify the purpose of the discussion. • State tactfully that the issue is not relevant to this discussion but might be useful in another meeting or discussion.
Side conversations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue on with the meeting agenda and see if the conversations end. • Ask team members to share their discussion with the entire group. • Ask that the side conversations stop. • Take a break.
Disagreement among team members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask a question that requires a factual rather than emotional response.
A member who rejects a suggestion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask the member to propose a suggestion. • Invite suggestions from others.
Senior team members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask for their comments after other members have contributed.

Facilitation Guidelines

Even when there is mutual understanding among team members and clear knowledge of the facilitation role, difficult situations will occur.

The tables on the last pages of this module describe facilitation guidelines or general principles to keep in mind when facilitating. These tables indicate when to use a particular guideline, how to use it, the barriers that prevent using it, and strategies to eliminate the barriers. The guidelines are:

- Stay neutral in the team.
- Encourage participation by all.
- Help team reach consensus.
- Reflect feelings and ideas back to the team.
- Help team keep itself on track.
- Expect a great deal of pain.

Self-awareness

While these guidelines and suggestions are helpful, they alone will not make an effective facilitator. The key ingredient of a successful facilitator is the degree of knowledge the coach has about him- or herself. The facilitator must be willing to honestly answer the following questions:

- How sensitive am I to the needs of others?
- How approachable, pleasant, or positive do others perceive me to be?
- Do I listen and communicate openly?
- Do I work well with others?
- Do I believe in improvement?
- Am I willing to be wrong or to lack knowledge?
- Am I willing to learn about myself as well as about how to support teams?
- Am I willing to have my priorities become second to the priorities of the team or team leader?

An effective facilitator realizes that he or she must answer these questions positively and honestly, and continually strive to improve.

Facilitation Guideline #1
STAY NEUTRAL IN THE TEAM

Benefit

Prevent bias.

Credibility maintained by not taking sides.

<p>SITUATION (When might the situation cause you to take sides?)</p> <p>You own or are attached to the process.</p> <p>You are responsible for the final decision or recommendation</p> <p>Questions are directed at you.</p> <p>You are asked to referee.</p> <p>You think you know the answer to a problem.</p> <p>Silence.</p>	<p>HOW (to deal with it)</p> <p>Allow members to respond with ideas and suggestions before you give your input</p> <p>Formally assign someone else to be the facilitator - do not work as facilitator with a team when you are leading it, or when you own the process.</p> <p>Open questions up to team; direct questions back to the team.</p> <p>Stay quiet (just inject information about process).</p> <p>Encourage participation.</p>
<p>BARRIERS (to not being neutral)</p> <p>Desire to help team.</p> <p>The attraction of power – it is “your” team, you want to make decisions and have things go your way.</p> <p>Impatience for the time it takes the team to work.</p> <p>Ego/Flattery.</p>	<p>STRATEGIES (to eliminate barriers)</p> <p>Establish ground rules.</p> <p>Let the team know about your bias, and your intent to avoid acting upon that bias</p> <p>Allow process/team to work.</p> <p>Be patient.</p> <p>When you need to offer an opinion or make a decision before the team has had input, announce that you are doing it, and why.</p>

Facilitation Guideline #2**ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION BY ALL****Benefit**

Maximize productivity.

Encourage the team's ownership of the process and the results of teamwork.

<p>SITUATION (What you may see when team members are not fully participating)</p> <p>Silence.</p> <p>Dominance by one person, perhaps the leader, but also may be other members.</p> <p>Logistics block interaction.</p> <p>Team fear of supervisor on team.</p> <p>“Group think” – everyone blindly agrees with a dominant person</p>	<p>HOW (to deal with it)</p> <p>Ask easy questions of team members.</p> <p>Rearrange seating.</p> <p>Talk privately with leader if s/he is the dominating person – focus on goals, not individual behavior.</p> <p>Talk to manager or supervisor.</p> <p>Thank members for contribution and ask others what they think.</p>
<p>BARRIERS (to participating)</p> <p>Not wanting ownership of decisions by members.</p> <p>Fear of appearing “stupid” or “wrong.”</p> <p>Fear that participation may hurt their standing, or practice.</p> <p>Fatigue.</p>	<p>STRATEGIES (to encourage participation by everyone)</p> <p>Establish participation as a ground rule in first meeting! (In order for group to be successful, everyone must participate).</p> <p>Work for consensus (get consensus from each person at each decision point).</p> <p>Use energizers.</p>

Facilitation Guideline #3
HELP TEAM REACH CONSENSUS

Benefit

Everyone buys in! People support what they help to create.

Decisions usually of better quality.

<p>SITUATION (When do you want to reach consensus, or validate that consensus exists?)</p> <p>When a decision or action, no matter how small, is necessary.</p> <p>When there has been disagreement.</p> <p>When there is silence.</p> <p>When there is a lack of non-verbal agreement.</p>	<p>HOW (to deal with lack of consensus)</p> <p>Use a provocative statement, or play devil's advocate, to probe the limits of apparent consensus.</p> <p>Find common ground.</p> <p>Use a second-best decision-making approach such as voting or decision matrix.</p>
<p>BARRIERS (to achieving consensus)</p> <p>Some people will never agree.</p> <p>Hidden agendas.</p> <p>People want to maintain their areas of influence.</p> <p>Personality clash.</p> <p>Lack of clarity on a topic.</p>	<p>STRATEGIES (for reaching consensus)</p> <p>Use tools – agree on root cause, clarify a process, force field analysis.</p> <p>Improve group process – enhance open communication, effective feedback.</p> <p>Focus group on common purpose or goals of a decision.</p> <p>Ask for compromise options.</p> <p>Deflect attention from subjective to objective.</p> <p>Identify to group that they're floundering (i.e. stop/pause and get group to identify and resolve barriers).</p>

Facilitation Guideline #4

REFLECT FEELINGS AND IDEAS BACK TO THE TEAM

Benefit

Foster group learning about how to monitor and intercede in group process.

Team will gain ownership of team behaviors.

<p>SITUATION (when to reflect feelings and ideas) Team wants you to make a decision. Group loses its train of thought. To clarify issues. To summarize.</p>	<p>HOW (to deal with it) Ask clarifying question. Call time out; do process audit (validate “What I seem to hear is...”). Ask open-ended questions.</p>
<p>BARRIERS (to reflecting feelings and ideas) You don’t know how to do this – you may be new, or new to the team or leader role. When someone is angry. When you are not the leader, and the leader does not want you to directly intervene.</p>	<p>STRATEGIES (for giving reflective feedback) Speak to people individually. Don’t become a counselor for group. If you are not the leader, work with and through the leader – arrange a secret signal that will tell the leader you have something important that he or she should address.</p>

Facilitation Guideline #5
HELP TEAM KEEP ITSELF ON TRACK

Benefit

Team has responsibility.

Focus on goal.

Efficient time management.

<p>SITUATION (When to emphasize team monitoring)</p> <p>Team is experienced, not in a forming stage. Team drifts off task. Deadlines are not met, reports are not prepared, members are not ready when the meeting starts.</p>	<p>HOW (to deal with it when the team falls away from its goals)</p> <p>Stick to process (refocus team) with reflective feedback. Clarify that goals are still desired and important (validate the purpose of an intended improvement). Clarify timelines. Clarify individual and team responsibilities.</p>
<p>BARRIERS (to staying focused)</p> <p>Inexperience. Team in forming or storming stage. Lack of interest. Issue has been overcome by events and is no longer important to work on. It has taken too long to get work done in the past.</p>	<p>STRATEGIES (to get the team on track, and get them to do it themselves)</p> <p>Make things visible (use flip chart). Summarize where team has been and is going. Ask team members to advise how they would get back on track. Allow distracting discussions to go on only for about 5 minutes and then call team to task – if you are not the leader, use the “secret signal” with the team leader to encourage the leader’s role in taking action to get back on track</p>

Facilitation Guideline #6

EXPECT A GREAT DEAL OF PAIN

(i.e. even if you know the answer, let team struggle and handle the problem)

Benefit

Leader grows.

Promotes group involvement.

Stimulates group pride.

<p>SITUATION (When you want to take charge) You know answer and group is stumbling. The team has taken the work in a direction you did not anticipate. Group asks you for answers.</p>	<p>HOW (to not take over) Let group work out answers. Stick with group process.</p>
<p>BARRIERS (to being patient with the team process) Wanting to do a good job. Not wanting to be uncomfortable. Wanting to look smart – “the improvement expert.” Wanting to be very directive – to control the team.</p>	<p>STRATEGIES (to tolerate the pain) Endure, endure, and endure. Trust in the process – for example, if you select an approach to developing an action plan, and it works, don’t change the approach! Stick with it. Let group try longer.</p>

**References
and
Recommended
Readings**

Carr, Clay. *Team Leader's Problem Solver*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1996.

Scholtes, Peter R. *The Team Handbook*, Madison, Wisconsin: Joiner Associates, Inc., 1988.

Schwarz, Roger M. *The Skilled Facilitator*, San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1994.