

# What is Facilitation?

In recent times the art of facilitation has receded in importance with increased focus on managing and controlling rather than on facilitating and supporting. However, with the increasing trend towards empowering individuals and teams and changing styles of management and teachers, organisations are realising the value of facilitation.

Here are some ways in which facilitators have described what they do:

**F**acilitation is guiding a group to use its knowledge, skills and potential to achieve its goals.

.....

**F**acilitation is about helping. It's about making processes easier. It's about guiding rather than directing.

.....

**F**acilitation is about process rather than context – how you do something rather than what you do.

**G**roup facilitation is a process in which a person who is acceptable to all members of the group, substantively neutral and with no decision making authority, intervenes to help a group improve the way it identifies and solves problems and makes decisions, with a view to improving the group's effectiveness. (Schwartz)

.....

**F**acilitators share power and are accepting.

**F**acilitation is about movement, moving from A to B. The facilitator guides the group towards an agreed destination.

.....

**F**acilitation makes it easier for the group to get to the agreed destination.

.....

**F**acilitation is striking a balance between the group and the task.

## What is Facilitation?

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### ACTIVITY

#### **What about you?**

How would you describe or define facilitation?

As you work through this resource you may decide to modify or change your definition, or you may be confirmed in your view.

## Self review






### Starting the journey

To begin your journey through this material you may need to clarify your own knowledge and beliefs and even your role to some extent, particularly as it relates to facilitation of meetings and groups.

One way of doing this is through self reflection activities. Note - these activities are also, in themselves, effective strategies to engage others in specific tasks and processes and for that reason can be modified to suit your purposes as a group facilitator.

### ACTIVITY

#### A. Mapping the skills and qualities

-  Think back to facilitators you have observed and worked with. They may have been group leaders, coaches or presenters.
-  Think of one or two who stood out as good facilitators in your mind. What was it about them and what they did that made them effective?
-  List the skills and qualities of an effective facilitator. (If you are working with others create a collage of responses to form a web on flip chart paper.)
-  Now, distinguish between those that are people-related and those attributes that are task-related.
-  Which of these do you think
  - a) you have?
  - b) you need to work on?

# Self review

## ACTIVITY

### B. Stimulating thoughts

Read and respond to the stimulus material that follows, and where possible share your thoughts with others. Which of the following statements have the most meaning to you? Why?

We diminish others when we define purpose and meaning for them, even if they ask us to do so.  
P. Block

We shape our thinking in the process of expressing it.  
E. Eisner

What influences people the least is what you say. What influences people the most is what they think about you before you open your mouth.  
(Source unknown)

You can't judge them. You can't fix them. You can show them.  
B. McCarthy

Silence is particularly appropriate when you have nothing to say.  
Anon

Unless we can insist that our learners be involved in the learning and ultimately take over the responsibility for their own learning experiences, then authentic learning will not happen.  
S. Morris

Which way did they go? How many were there? I must find them. I am their leader.  
Anon

I can never tell you what you said, but only what I heard.  
J.Powell

Stress = taking responsibility for things you have no power over.  
R. Kegan

Doubt of any sort cannot be removed except by action.  
T. Carlyle

I am always ready to learn although I do not always like being taught.  
Churchill

To raise new questions, new possibilities, to regard old problems from a new angle requires creative imagination and makes real advances.  
Einstein

The ultimate goal of a facilitator or change agent is that they are no longer needed.  
Anon

# Self review




C. Building awareness – understanding oneself better in order to understand where others are at.

## What do you understand about yourself as a facilitator?


Spend a moment reflecting on your role as facilitator by completing the stems:

 I've been thinking about .....

.....

 The issues and questions that arise for me are .....

.....

 The roles I feel comfortable with in a team or group are .....

.....

 The impact this might have on my role as facilitator is .....

.....

 The areas of need I would like to explore further are .....

.....

 My personal needs that might interfere with my role as a facilitator .....

.....

## Self review

### Remember...

- ✓ Self-trust is prerequisite to developing trusting relationships with others.
- ✓ The best facilitators .... "are clear about their own values and beliefs in areas such as pedagogy, philosophy and spirituality.
- ✓ They manage their behaviours to be congruent with those values.
- ✓ They experience a well-defined sense of personal identity, which comes, in part, from their ability to articulate their beliefs with precision and passion.....Trusting yourself also means being conscious of the ways in which you process and make meaning of experiences".

(Costa & Garmston, 1994:38)



### Note

*There are other guidelines for reflecting individually on your role as facilitator in the Reflecting Window*

## Self review

### EFFECTIVE FACILITATOR

#### Ethics

To effectively facilitate groups requires an awareness of group dynamics and knowledge of self. Some of the meta-level skills that we need to acquire centre on ethics. Leadership, facilitation and teaching are all roles of influence in which we work with people. The roles must be considered within an ethical context.

*"All our decisions whether personal or professional, have an effect on others. Therefore, problem solving and decision making must be done with people in mind. Ethics involves giving honest consideration to underlying motive, to potential harm, if any, and to congruency with established values".*  
(Dalke & Ankerstar, 1995:17)

*"Effective group facilitation is an artful dance requiring rigorous discipline. The role of the facilitator offers an opportunity to dance with life on the edge of a sword - to be present and aware - to be with and for people in a way that cuts through to what enhances and fulfils life. A facilitator is a peaceful warrior".*  
(Hunter, Bailey and Taylor 94:1)

## Self review



### Ethical questions that we need to consider...

- Do I maintain appropriate confidentiality?
- Is the predetermined outcome the one that the group really needs to work on?
- How self aware am I ?
- What are my motives?
- Why do I really do this?
- What do I understand about myself as I seek this desired outcome?
- Do I understand and manage personal biases?
- Am I remaining impartial (non attachment to particular outcomes and strategies)
- Do I enable the group process to unfold?
- Am I open and honest with myself and others?
- Can I balance organisational and individual needs and interests?
- Do I check for and maintain congruency with the values of the organisation, their personal values and cultural contexts?
- Do I value and respect diversity?
- Will what I am doing cause harm at any level?
- Do I mind having my own assumptions challenged?

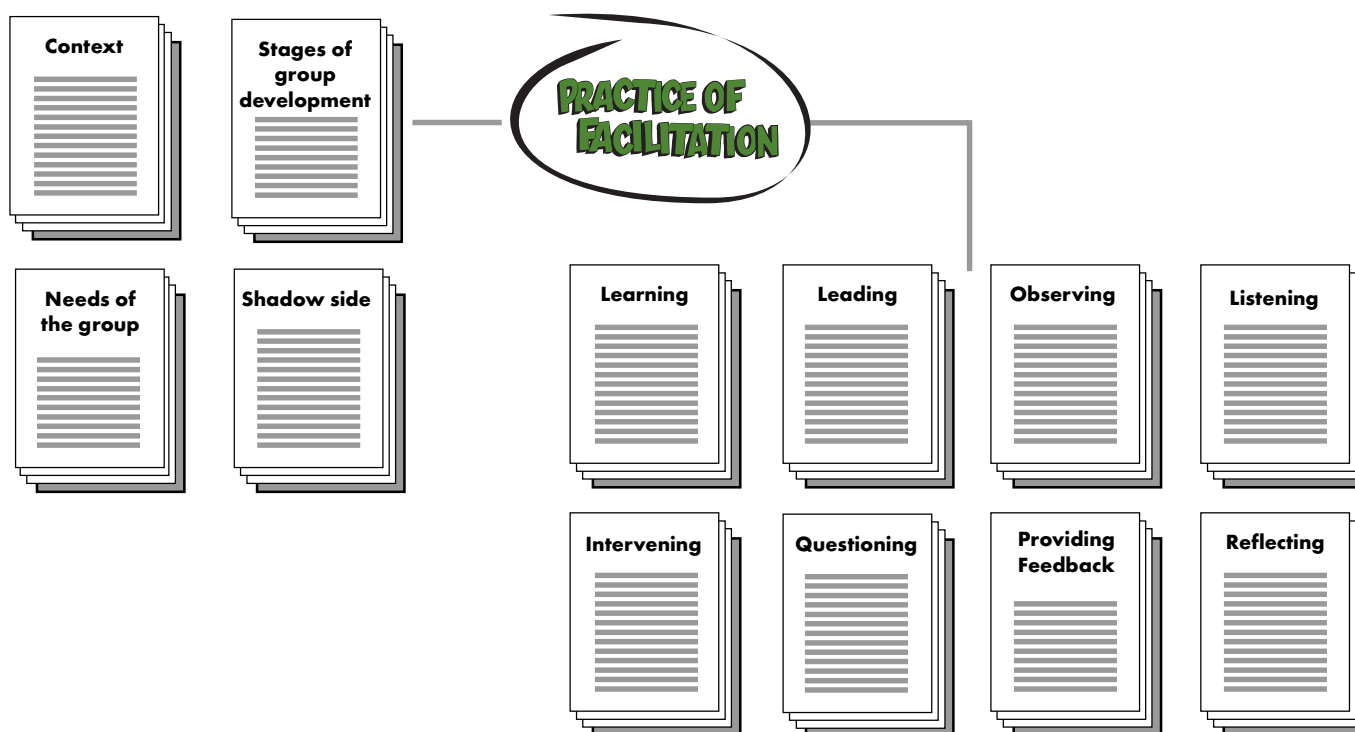
We learn through practice. Effective facilitators ensure that they have networks as a way of obtaining feedback. It is a life long journey and the skills may take years to acquire. A facilitator's greatest need is to remain open to constructive feedback. Therefore it is crucial that we seek ongoing help from others on this journey.

***We look forward to sharing this journey with you!***

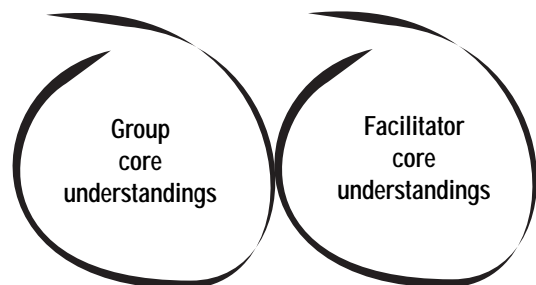
# How To Use This Handbook

Have you ever worked with a group and found yourself saying, “I’m not sure what to do next?” You have a good idea of what you would like to do and an understanding of what is good practice, but the dynamics of the group, their individual personalities, the task at hand, the influence of the organisation’s politics and your own feelings, together make it difficult to think on your feet and respond flexibly.

In this handbook we have captured the complex nature of facilitation with a set of Core Understandings. The idea is that in a glance you can see the essential skills a facilitator needs alongside the issues of the group. The material is designed as a resource for you to dip into as you need it. You can start anywhere and you can go anywhere.



# How To Use This Handbook



## The domains of facilitation

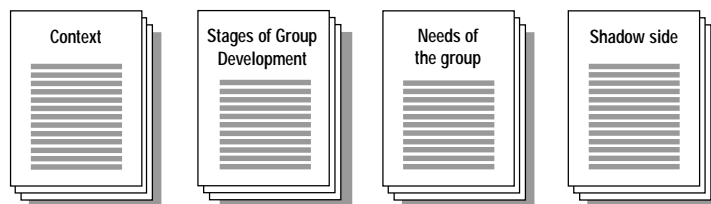
We have clustered facilitation issues into two domains:

Group Core Understandings explore the issues of the groups you are likely to work with.

Facilitator Core Understandings are a list of the essential skills for facilitators.

### Group understandings

#### *Windows 1 - 4*

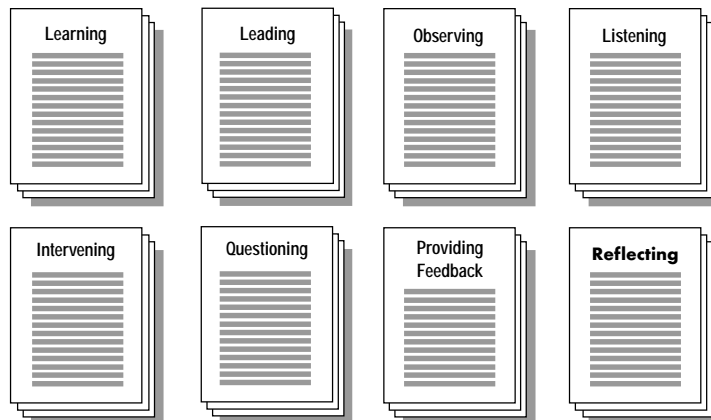


## Core understandings

The Group understandings explore five contexts that you are likely to be working in: the classroom, the training room, the workshop, a meeting and a consultancy. The key issues within each of these contexts include: the stages of group development, the needs of the group and the potential for conflict that can emerge from the shadow side (defensive behaviours).

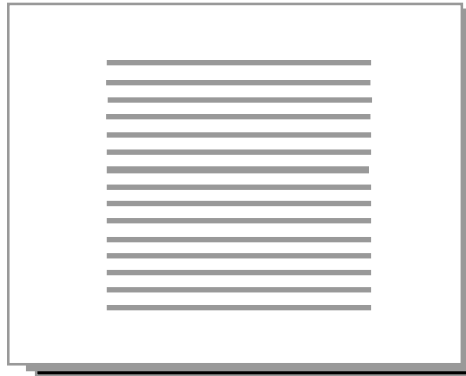
### Facilitator understandings

#### *Windows 5 - 12*



The Facilitator understandings explore learning theory and its implications for facilitation and describe the styles of facilitation in terms of leading, observing, listening, intervening, questioning, providing feedback and reflecting.

## How To Use This Handbook



### The windows

Each of the core understandings is described through a set of resource windows which include a description of the issues, general strategies and a list of hot tips and pitfalls. These windows open up opportunities to look into new ways of working with groups.



### Case Studies

The case studies are examples of facilitation at work. The handbook includes ten case studies, which cover all five contexts and link the Facilitator and the Group domains. These studies provide a description of the case, outline what the facilitator did, analyse whether it was good practice and suggest alternative approaches.

You can develop your own scenario/s to explore your own working needs. You can do this by selecting a context such as the meeting room, then include the specific needs of the group and its stage of development and throw in some shadow side then you have captured enough information for a case study to apply the facilitation skills.

*Happy browsing!*