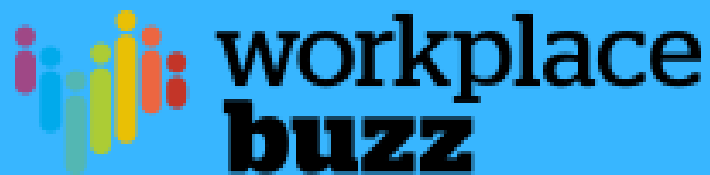

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FACILITATION SKILLS: GUIDING TO THE GOAL

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What is it?

Effective facilitation has the aim of help individuals or groups work effectively and productively, by acting as a process guide to the flow of conversation.

Facilitators contribute to discussions by framing the situation and end goals, providing resources and information a team might need and helping to keep direction and drive to ensure everyone arrives at the end goal.

A skilled facilitator will avoid those frustrating meetings where nothing really is achieved, conflicts or tangents dominated, or decisions simply weren't made. Instead, they will create a meeting experience that feels cohesive, inclusive and productive

.Good facilitation skills aren't about establishing yourself as an outspoken leader but allowing everyone else to contribute, bringing a team together and about creating a common goal.

How to do it?

Environment:

- Start by ensuring a trusting and inclusive setting. This includes setting some ground rules for the discussion and how to deal with issues that might come up. Turn up prepared for the talk with any information or resource the group might need and be able to clearly define the goal.
- Build opportunities for self-awareness and reflection. Help members to understand what they bring to the group.
- State and ask - state your position on a topic but make it clear that their input is needed and where your gaps in knowledge are.
- Adapt to the needs of each particular team and meeting.

Guidance:

- Recognise and invite – encourage wider participation and recognise those reluctant to contribute with opinion questions or extra time. Use several to help more people be heard.
- Observe and ask - notice and name the elephant in the room. Take point on conversation barriers and ask open questions about experiences.
- Encourage information - draw out more information and opinion with open phrases i.e. 'tell be more about that', 'what else was going on there' or simply, 'go on'

Communication:

- Restate – demonstrate that you are listening and check your understanding. This allows for corrections and encourages the speaker to divulge more.
- Connect to the goal - encourage detours and tangents to be connected back to the objective i.e. 'I see your point, how can this contribute to a goal here?'
- Summarize and test - keep everyone on the same page. Summarize at regular intervals the conversation so far and check each other's understanding to avoid assumptions and mistakes.

Benefits

Good facilitation skills enable better decision making, through keeping track of the problem or goal at hand, and by drawing out more information and ideas from the group. This leads on to creating 'learning organisations' that are able to develop from and build on their own feedback and experiences to consistently learn and grow.

It also keeps team members involved and to feel a part of the solution and personally invested. It is a tool that can be used to motivate and empower members, not just to contribute in this instance, but ongoing. As such, it also reduces and enable better managing of conflict arising from different opinions and communication styles.