

## **Group Facilitation: Developing Capacities for Outstanding Results**

Facilitation is a key capacity for 21<sup>st</sup> leadership and should be part of leadership development education and training. Facilitation is essential to foster participation, engagement, and the investment necessary to not only fulfill the tasks and deliverables of a group, but to develop the requisite capacities for a group to do their best work. While formal education and training in facilitation is useful, learning from one's lived experience is a viable path toward developing facilitation skills.

### **Some Definitions**

According to Weaver and Farrel (1997), "facilitation is the process through which a person helps others complete their work and improve the way they work together" (p. 3). In this way facilitators provide methods and support for accomplishing tasks and helping group members work together.

Schwarz (1994) defines "facilitation as a process ... to help a group improve the way it identifies and solves problems and makes decisions, in order to increase the group's effectiveness" (p. 4). Thus, the primary purpose of facilitation is to help the group increase its effectiveness by improving its process. Process refers to how a group works together, such as communication patterns, the manner in which they identify and solve problems, decision-making, and conflict resolution.

### **Kinds of Facilitation**

Schwarz (1994) describes two kinds of facilitation: basic and developmental. In basic facilitation, the facilitator assumes primary responsibility for managing the group's process in order to work more effectively but the skill in facilitation remains with the facilitator.

In developmental facilitation, the facilitator shares the responsibility for managing the group process with the group toward more effective work, but also helps them develop their own group process skills.

Whether conducting basic or developmental, the facilitator strives for neutrality in the content and outcome of the group's work, but not necessarily in the process. In other words, the facilitator's primary focus is on the process not the product on the group's work.

### **Elements of Facilitation**

According to Weaver and Farrell facilitation consists of four elements—Task, Process, Group, and Self. *Task* refers to identifying, clarifying, and completing tasks and the work a group does. Good facilitation can help groups be more effective in their work.

*Process* refers to a set of activities, resources, practices, and tools which help groups work effectively together to fulfill their tasks and goals. Process can be focused on relationships, making decisions, solving problems, group performance, etc.

The element of *group* refers to the understanding group dynamics, and how this understanding informs how one directs the group process. Group dynamics include such variables as identifying group goals, developing group norms, establishing constructive communication and conflict resolution practices, appropriate decision making processes and problem solving, as well as fostering the group's development.

And the element of *self* refers to the facilitator's level of self-knowledge as the ground for making sense of what is occurring in the group and the actions taken on behalf of this group. Every facilitator should base their work in an explicit set of values, beliefs and behaviors to help groups do their work effectively.

### **Learning from Experience**

Leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> century calls for developed facilitation skills. In addition to workshops and training in group facilitation, skillful facilitation is achieved through experience and an intentional practice of learning from this experience. Below are some suggested ways through which leadership practitioners can learn from their own experience toward the development of these skills.

- 1) Describe an experience of facilitating a group (or an experience in which you experienced the facilitation of another);
  - a. Reflect on this facilitation experience.
  - b. What made it effective?
  - c. What needs more attention?
  
- 2) Analyze this description from the lens of the two kinds and four elements facilitation;
  - a. Two kinds
    - i. Basic
    - ii. Developmental
  
  - b. Four elements
    - i. Task
    - ii. Process
    - iii. Group
    - iv. Self
  
- 3) Identify areas for further learning;

- 4) Create an action plan to apply this learning in a subsequent facilitation opportunity;
- 5) Then repeat steps 1 – 4.

### **References**

Schwarz, R. M. (1994). *The Skilled Facilitator*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Weaver, R.G. & Farrell, J.D. (1997). *Managers as Facilitators*. San Francisco: Barrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

- 1) Identify and describe experience
- 2) Make meaning in terms of two kinds and four elements
- 3) First person AR:

### **References**

Schwarz, R. M. (1994). *The Skilled Facilitator*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Weaver, R.G. & Farrell, J.D. (1997). *Managers as Facilitators*. San Francisco: Barrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

reflect on facilitation experiences: use a case study or one of the above incidences of good facilitation. What made it effective? What needed development?

Analyze experience based on two kinds and the four elements