

Facilitation Competencies

- an Evaluation Framework
for Facilitators

CONTINUAL DRAFT

Introduction

There has been much talk about establishing some kind of accreditation for facilitators – perhaps similar to the accreditation for mediators. After long discussions, InterAct and InterAct Networks have come to the conclusion that accreditation is not the route to take in order to improve practice in the field. Instead, we are committed to supporting and stimulating continual learning and improvement.

This framework has been developed by InterAct (www.interactweb.org.uk) in partnership with InterAct Networks (www.interactnetworks.co.uk). We hope it will help to improve the quality of facilitation practice by encouraging and assisting facilitators to continually review their learning and practice.

The framework is not meant to be totally comprehensive, or to be the definitive guide. It is focused on facilitating meetings rather than large and complex engagement processes, although it might be a useful starting point for the latter. **We expect the framework to evolve and develop as people try it out, and as practice continually moves on.** We would welcome your comments and suggestions at any time to Lindsey.Colbourne@virgin.net.

Using this framework

Section 1 of the framework sets out key activities/qualities for 11 core competency areas identified by InterAct/InterAct Networks..

Section 2 invites you to evaluate your performance in terms of your strengths and weaknesses, and what steps you will take to improve in the future.

We anticipate that at first you may have to refer to Section 1 as a prompt, but with time you may feel that you can simply use Section 2.

We hope that you will become used to using this framework both:

- **Individually** – or in pairs or as a group – both after every event that you design, facilitate, record or support (using the short framework), and annually referring more carefully to the longer framework
- **Within facilitator networks**, perhaps at your annual review meeting, to review your progress and identify your focus for learning over the next year. (For more information on networks see www.interactnetworks.co.uk)

You are of course very welcome to modify the framework to make it more suitable for you ... and to give us feedback at any time.

Please feel free to reproduce the framework, with acknowledgement to InterAct and InterAct Networks, together with website listings – www.interactweb.org.uk; www.interactnetworks.co.uk.

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Lindsey Colbourne 2003.

The core competency areas

A competent facilitator/facilitation team:

1. Helps the commissioning body to prepare for the engagement
2. Designs a tailor made programme
3. Checks the participants are supportive of the process and willing and able (enabled) to participate effectively
4. Provides the most appropriate 'team' for the job
5. Ensures independence and accountability of the facilitation
6. Acts with integrity and equality
7. Creates a suitable atmosphere
8. Holds clarity throughout the meeting
9. Encourages meaningful interactions
10. Treats every facilitation as a learning opportunity
11. Follows up the process to ensure the results are used and participants are informed

Section 1: The competent facilitator....

BEFORE the meeting

1. **Helps the 'commissioning body'** (i.e. the organization, individual or group who have asked you to facilitate), and where possible at least some of the participants **to carefully consider and clarify**:
 - a. Appropriate aims and outputs for the meeting (s) including
 - whether the meeting is to *inform* decision making or to *make* a decision
 - if it is to reach some level of 'consensus' opinion, or whether it is to explore the range of views that exist
 - b. How the commissioning body (and/or others) will specifically use the results, and whether any internal preparation is required to ensure that the results are used
 - c. Whether a participatory decision making approach is appropriate (i.e. check that there is a genuine reason for engaging people and that the decision is genuinely open to debate), and the type of engagement that is appropriate (see the InterAct Networks training manual)
 - d. Who should be engaged (see also 3. below)
 - e. Whether an independent facilitator and/or 'convenor' is needed.

2. **Designs a tailor made programme**
 - a. Ensures the programme follows clear and logical steps towards meeting specific aims and outputs
 - b. Makes use of appropriate techniques chosen specifically for that particular meeting(s).
 - c. Ensures constraints of time and venue; the needs, experience and characteristics of participants (especially traditionally excluded groups such as those with limited literacy, non-English speakers, people with special needs); the capacity of the facilitator team (including number of facilitators, preparation, skills) are all taken into account
 - d. Checks the design with the commissioning body and if possible participants – if not before hand, at least at the start of the meeting.
 - e. Considers the interests of other stakeholders (i.e. people likely to be affected by the results of the meeting but who will not be present) in the design of the process

3. **Checks that the participants are supportive of the process and willing and able (enabled) to participate effectively.**
 - a. Ensures that a clear and appropriate framework for selecting and inviting participants is used and that a good cross section are actually attending, including with the necessary authority/decision-making power to ensure the results of the meeting are taken forward
 - b. Ensures the needs of the participants are carefully considered and where possible met to enable as full participation as possible (e.g. consideration is given to language needs, accessibility, acoustics, chairs, toilets, the non-literate, sound, timing, etc)
 - c. Sets and maintains ground rules (collaboratively where possible) to guide the process and ensures these are agreed by all participants.

4. **Provides the most appropriate 'team' for the job.**
 - a. Considers the number required in the team and the characteristics, skills and experience required in order to do an effective job, including whether the team is representative of the local demographic profile e.g. sector, gender, race etc
 - b. Ensures sufficient and appropriate briefing, information and training for facilitators
 - c. Uses 'content' experts alongside facilitators where appropriate.
 - d. Ensures the team members have clear roles and responsibilities, and a sound understanding of their task

BEFORE and DURING the meeting

5. Ensures independence and accountability

- a. Clarifies with participants and the commissioning body the role of the facilitators (i.e. focus on process not content). While participants bring knowledge and expertise concerning the 'content' of the meeting, facilitators bring knowledge and expertise concerning the 'process' or group interaction process.
- b. Careful to minimize influence on group outcomes
- c. Raises any conflict of interest.
- d. Offer 'content' knowledge only when it is not otherwise available to the group, when it is vital for the group to have it, if the facilitator offers it after explaining their change in role, and with permission from the group.
- e. Is aware of personal prejudices and bias, dealing with and acknowledging them as appropriate

6. Acts with integrity and equality

- a. Promotes equitable relationships among the participants, commissioning body and facilitator(s)
- b. Considers power dynamics and ensures 'weaker' parties access to dialogue and decision-making
- c. Builds rapport with all parties
- d. Avoids being drawn into endorsing or colluding with any party.
- e. Respects confidentiality at all times

7. Creates suitable atmosphere

- a. Checks venue, access and catering before the meeting to ensure it meets participants needs
- b. Arrives early and sets up the room, organizes refreshments, signage, information, access and equipment (including details such as paper stacks, pens, post its etc)
- c. Promotes tolerance and understanding between people of different backgrounds, politics, cultures, beliefs, preferences
- d. Helps the facilitation team start the meeting in a positive frame of mind
- e. Responds effectively and constructively to what emerges 'in the moment' rather than sticking rigidly to a pre-determined programme
- f. Although flexible in programme, ensures that those key elements needing discussion are given sufficient and appropriate time, and that promised 'breaks' and finish times are kept to
- g. Engenders confidence from participants through illustrating an open, receptive and approachable demeanour

DURING the meeting

8. Holds clarity throughout the meeting

- a. explains all tasks with clarity, using a variety of appropriate methods, skills and techniques (such as flip charts, models, diagrams, pictures, descriptions) ensuring that all are included and all understand what is required of whom, when and how
- b. keeps discussions focused on the aim, desired outcome and required decision-making of the meeting
- c. ensures any changes in aim that emerge during the meeting are openly discussed and agreed with participants
- d. uses methods of recording that are appropriate to maintaining the focus of the meeting
- e. ensures that any outcomes or decisions are agreed and recorded appropriately and with the agreement of participants

9. Encourages meaningful interactions

- a. Encourages participants to express their needs and concerns in their own way.
- b. Provides appropriate structure for discussions, and for participants to develop their thoughts and views
- c. Allows thinking time.
- d. Recognises and responds to changes in group dynamics, energy levels etc
- e. Checks back understanding of participants' needs and concerns.
- f. Pays attention to language, tone of voice and body language.
- g. Treats the participants in an impartial and non-directive manner.
- h. Gives the participants appropriate time and attention
- i. Reframes (adjusts) the content and style of communication between participants to facilitate constructive exchanges.
- j. Recognises and draws attention to any power imbalances within the facilitation process, identifying alternative options where the power imbalances hinder the facilitation process
- k. Uses a range of interventions to limit the adverse effect of strongly expressed negative feelings and emotions.
- l. Manages aggression by parties in order to sustain the facilitation process.

AFTER the meeting

10. Treats every facilitation as a learning opportunity

- a. reviews lessons learned after every event
- b. uses appropriate mixture of self, peer, participant and commissioning body feedback
- c. Recognises and addresses the effects of ones own prejudices, values, beliefs, feelings, perceptions and behaviours on participants and other facilitators.
- d. identifies ways of continually improving understanding and practice.

11. Follows up.

- a. ensures that participants are provided with a copy of any report/outcome of the engagement, and at least one update/information on how the results were used
- b. works with the commissioning body to ensure that they use the results to inform decisions and that they integrate any learning from both the process used and the content results.
- c. Ensures that the facilitation and supporting team are given appropriate and clear feedback

Section 2: How are you doing?...

After each event or process you run or help with, you may find it useful alone or with others to answer the three questions below, referring simply to the competency headings as a general prompt.

- Helped the commissioning body to prepare for the engagement?
- Designed a tailor made programme?
- Checked the participants are supportive of the process and willing and able (enabled) to participate effectively?
- Provided the most appropriate 'team' for the job
- Ensured independence and accountability of the facilitation
- Acted with integrity and equality
- Created a suitable atmosphere
- Held clarity throughout the meeting
- Encouraged meaningful interactions
- Treated every facilitation as a learning opportunity
- Followed up the process

Perhaps **annually**, go through the competency framework in Section 1 and consider more carefully your performance progress on each.

2.1 What did or do I do well?

2.2 What didn't go so well, or what could I improve?

2.3 What steps can I take to make these improvements?