



Facilitating the 'Too Serious!' Way

I facilitate for a living. It's the most challenging side of the multifaceted career that I have chosen to follow, and also the one for which I am most passionate.

"What is facilitation", I wish you'd ask, "and why would one need a facilitator anyway?"

Glad you asked!

Facilitation means many things to me, and it is made up of many elements.

Generally, the need for facilitation originates from someone in an organization who cares very much about an issue that the organization is dealing with. The issue is usually a 'mess'.

A 'mess' is a special type of intractable (very difficult and seeming to be impossible to control, manage or solve) problem, puzzle or situation that involves people, ideas, trends, opinions, facts, personalities, agendas, objectives, constraints and a multitude of other such stuff that all interact together in complicated ways. So it is not obvious how to proceed. Or even if it is obvious, no practical progress is being made with it.

Messes come in all shapes and sizes. The interesting ones are usually scary. They hold the potential of stupendous payoff or terrifying failure. Politics almost always play a part. Bad blood too, sometimes.

Interestingly, those messes that, up to the point of my involvement, had defied all attempts at a solution for years, often turn out to be the most successful workshops (I call them 'shows') that I facilitate. They, of course, are my favorites. Probably because every new challenge keeps my creative juices flowing and accelerates my evolution.

My role is to help the organization get clear about its outcome vis-à-vis the 'mess' – at the moment (sometimes, outcomes change during the course of a show). Once we are clear about the outcome, we craft together a workshop design that takes into account such things as:

- ◆ Identifying and inviting the appropriate stakeholders
- ◆ Determining what, if any, prework is needed
- ◆ Assessing which, if any, proprietary software tools will be used
- ◆ Determining the likely flow of modules to produce the desired outcome
- ◆ Designing the modules so that each one engages the audience, provides valuable insight as it unfolds, and makes the process as fun and painless as possible for each stakeholder
- ◆ Sorting out meeting location logistics
- ◆ Making sure that the results are available to all in a clear, well documented format as soon as the show ends

Only one other aspect of my role is as important to the outcome of the show as preparing for it is, in my opinion: working closely with the client throughout the show, jointly managing the contingencies as they arise, and making infinite corrections to our course or MSUing (making stuff up) on the spur of the moment.

Because if I had to come down to the essence of facilitation, it is all about improvising in a business environment. It is about theatre. About the drama of ordinary people managing complicated situations. About having to achieve objectives with an overload of ambiguous information, and having to make practical, implementable, result producing decisions – at the speed of light.

That's why I call them 'shows', which may account for my current success rate of 97.683%.

And that's what facilitation is all about.

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Where do I excel?

Any situation that is hard, messy, insoluble!

A few typical examples might include:

Classic decision making in an uncertain environment ...

A complex group decision-making situation that involves a multi-disciplinary group, where any one individual's knowledge does not cover the full domain of the situation.

The process can be upset by politics, differing paradigms, looseness of language, and the overall complexity of the situation.

Generally, a two to three-day process involving a small (8 - 20 people) group of senior executives.

Decisions are made in the session. Political risk can be high. Successful payoff is usually extremely high.

'Trumpetology' or Scenario Planning ...

The focus for these sessions is usually one of making sense of the future. Or, at least, gaining a comfort level with the paradoxes inherent in the future.

Once this is done, the group can focus on actions that will mitigate the future and allow some shaping of the environment ahead.

Electronic Commerce Boot Camp ...

A favorite topic these days, evidently, in line with the rapid growth of the Internet.

Many 'traditional economy' companies fear what the future will bring via the Internet.

These two to three-day workshops allow groups to quickly familiarize themselves with what is current on the Internet. Through a series of activity modules, the group arrives at its own sense of what it needs to do and in what order, to get ahead of the Internet game.

Cost Reduction of Products ...

In just a few action-packed days, a multi-disciplinary product team takes a product apart, examines the design, its manufacturability, its margins and the total cost of ownership. The group then generates literally hundreds of cost-reduction ideas, selects the most promising ones, and finally sets up a process for capturing those costs and monitoring executional progress.


The difference such a process makes is typically calculated in the tens of millions of dollars saved to the organization's bottom line.

Can I help you?



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