



Successful Groups

A Successfully Functioning Group

One of the more popular organizational development slogans over the years has been this descriptive phrase that supposedly describes the phases of group development - “storming, forming, norming, performing”. The slogan has been said to represent the phases that a team goes through as it matures and becomes productive. This method is often slow, time consuming, and frustrating for many people. In addition, I believe that this kind of behavior reflects the irresponsibility of the leadership of the group. It doesn’t have to be this way. There are other alternatives to getting a team up and running in a productive fashion to which this article is addressed.

What Teams Are

Forming/managing teams and participating/cooperating with others in a team is not as difficult or “T” group like as first impressions often lead us to believe. Teams are nothing more than a group of people who reasonably and responsibly work together cooperatively to manage a process of achieving some stated objective.

If the group of people involved has no stated common objective that all have clarity and consensus about, there is no team. If the group of people involved does not have a common process for achieving the objective that all have clarity and consensus on, then there is no team. If the group of people involved do not cooperatively work together in a responsible and reasonable manner, then there is no team. In any one of these cases, we are left with only a collection of people who may or may not desire to actually be a team and who will accomplish little in assisting the organization improve its overall performance.

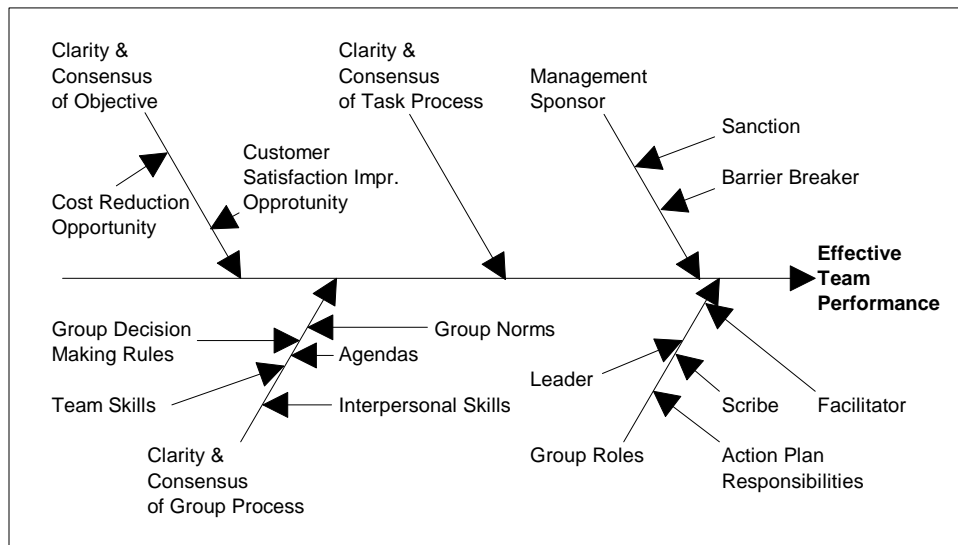
The Elements of Effective Teams

Effective teams achieve. They achieve because:

- 1) There is a stated objective to be achieved.
- 2) There is a stated “task accomplishment” process to achieve the objective.
- 3) They, as a group, share clarity and consensus about the objective and the “task accomplishment” process they will use to achieve the objective.
- 4) They, as a group, have found clarity and consensus about the “group management” process they will use that provides the structure for managing their efforts in achieving the objective.

- 5) As individuals, each person disciplines him or herself and demonstrates reasonable and responsible interpersonal skills in the team setting.
- 6) A person, a facilitator, accepts the responsibility for and acts to keep the team disciplined to the "task accomplishment" process to achieve the objective, to the "group management" process as it manages the "task accomplishment" process, and to disciplining team members to the demonstration of reasonable and responsible interpersonal behaviors.
- 7) A person, a team leader, who emerges or is appointed to be responsible for insuring that the team accomplishes its objective in a timely fashion.
- 8) A person, a scribe, accepts the responsibility for and acts to document the team's discussion, decisions, and accomplishments.
- 9) A person, a sponsoring manager or team of managers, who sanction, protect, break through organizational barriers, integrate work with other teams, and provide resources for the team.

Most of these elements to team effectiveness are very similar, if not synonymous with what makes for effective leadership of organizational behavior in my humble opinion. Leaders use a management or leadership process that provides vision, expectation, resources, and accountability for achieving the objective through the process. In addition, those in the team are facilitated and disciplined, by the leader, to a reasonable and responsible management of the process to achieve the objective. Individuals are facilitated and disciplined to a demonstration of behaviors that are a reasonable and responsible contribution to the team's performance.

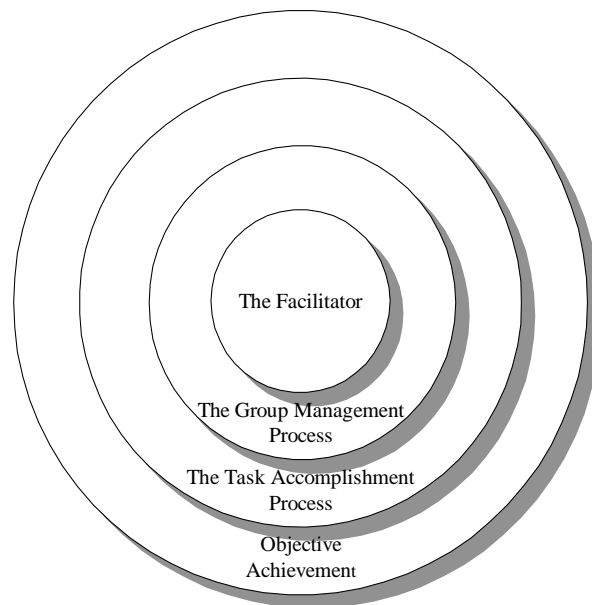


The organization's leadership is ultimately responsible to insure that the above conditions are present. However, in the day-to-day events of the team, a role called "facilitator" insures that these conditions for effective and efficient teams is developed and provided for. This facilitator follows a process called "The Group Management Process" to insure that the team is successful.

The Group Management Process

The Group Management Process is the process that the facilitator can use to insure that the team is successful in achieving its objective in a timely and efficient fashion. In this process, the facilitator is both a teacher, provider, and a leader of this small group of people as they work collaboratively and cooperatively to successfully accomplish some given objective given to them by the organization's leadership. The facilitator uses the "group management process" to provide for and to assist the small group learn and perform the "task accomplishment process". The small group's performance of the "task accomplishment process" leads to accomplishment of the objective.

The following diagram's intent is to show how the facilitator affects the achievement of the objective by using the group management process to assist the team perform the task accomplishment process and thus accomplish the group's objective.



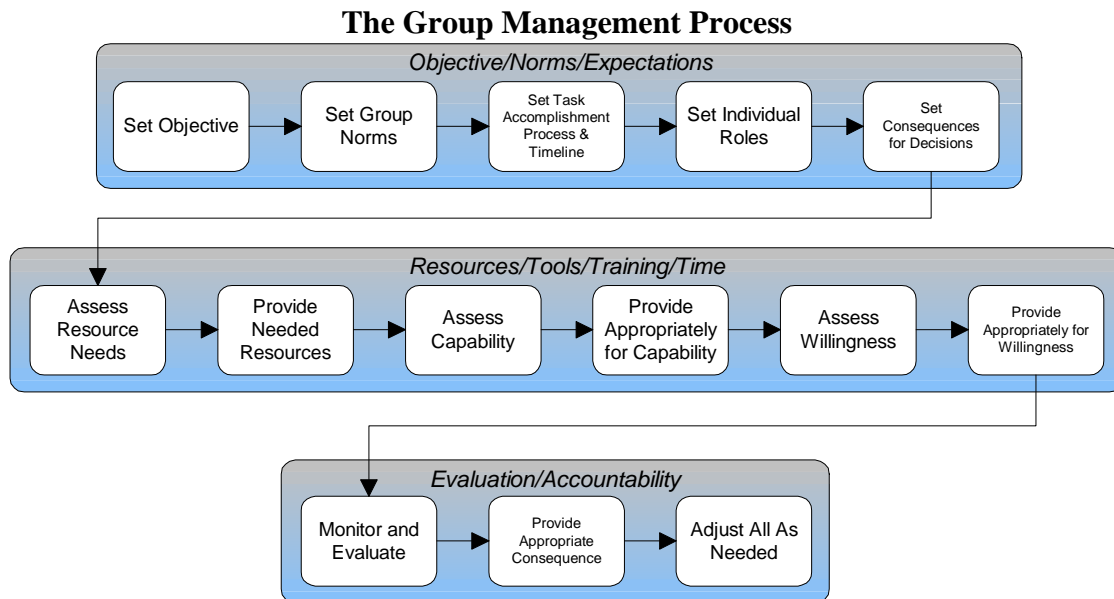
The Group Management Process is based on basic principles that govern human behavior to a large degree. First every person needs to know what is expected of them and of the group they are part of. Second, every person needs to develop and have the competency, tools, and time to behave in the expected fashion. Third, every person needs to feel accountable for behaving in the desired fashion from both the larger group and from their own internal norms.

If you consider the following flow diagram, one can see that performance of these "group management process" behaviors essentially covers those three aforementioned principles in a comprehensive fashion in the following manner:

- 1) Clarity about what is expected is created in terms of the objective, the group norms, the task accomplishment process, the timeline for getting things done, and what the individual role of any given person would be.
- 2) Provision of resources, tools, time, and/or training creates the capability to perform to what is expected both individually as well as a group.

- 3) Monitoring, evaluating and providing consequences that people know are coming as an outcome of their personal decisions creates a high sense of accountability and personal sense of responsibility for what they choose to do.

Please note, that it is not necessarily appropriate for the facilitator to be managing the accountability piece of the group management process unless that facilitator has an official position within the organization that enables he or she to do so. Often times, small group facilitators need to work closely with the sponsor or accountable manager to insure that the accountability component of the group management process is managed appropriately.



The Group Management Process is solely designed to leverage those three guiding principles of getting the behavior the organization wants from its people individually as well as collectively. The Group Management Process guides the facilitator’s behavior as he or she teaches and leads a group as the group performs the “task accomplishment process” to achieve some stated objective.

Linear vs. Nonsequenced Flow of the Group Management Process

In the beginning, a facilitator may find that they follow the flow of the group management process in a very linear fashion. The objective is discussed first and not moved away from until clarity and consensus have been established. Then, the method to achieve the objective (the task accomplishment process) is discussed and focused on until clarity and consensus have been established. This step-by-step discipline to the group management process is appropriate at the onset of the group’s formation.

However, once the group is functioning and has experienced each of the steps of the group management process, the facilitator then begins to observe, evaluate, and in a situationally appropriate fashion, use the group management process in a nonsequenced fashion. For example, the group may be functioning well over several weeks and then abruptly hit a constraint that diminishes the effectiveness of the group. Upon observation and evaluation, the facilitator may find that the constraint is caused by the forces outside of the group; several members now have

additional time requirements imposed on them by a job redesign that has imposed new and time consuming work requirements on them. This has in affect reduced the time resource that these members had that enabled them to effectively contribute to the group. The facilitator at this point would work the “group management process” step that provides the necessary resources for members by working with the appropriate managers to find a way to once again gain access to the time resource the members had earlier been given.

The Nonsequenced Group Management Process



Consequently, the group management process has both a linear functioning as well as a situationally based nonsequenced functioning. The linear functioning primarily occurs during the team’s formation and the situational functioning occurs as the group is progressing toward its objective.

Clarity and Consensus About The Objective and The Process

For the team to be effective and efficient in achieving its objective through the appropriate process, the team members must share the same understanding about what the objective actually is and what the process is that will be used to achieve the objective. To make more clear what the objective actually is, measures of objective achievement can be developed and used to judge whether the objective has been achieved or not. Clarity of the process can be created by actually flow charting the process that will be used. If further clarity is needed, a detailed process definition sheet can be made (Detailed Process Definition).

Clarity of objective and the task accomplishment process are extremely important in insuring that the team is functioning with unison. A lack of clarity cannot only inhibit the effectiveness and efficiency of the team to accomplish the objective, it can also increase the potential for inter-team conflict and poor participation.

Consensus between team members is also important to achieve. There is no sense in having a group of people try to work together to achieve something that they all cannot support or feel committed to do. It is hard enough to keep a like-minded group of people focused on an objective, let alone have a group of people who do not share the same objectives.

As we consider what consensus actually is, keep in mind that it does not necessarily mean total personal support for the objective or the issue at hand. What it does mean is that those in the group at minimum have all stated that they can all live with and work together on the objective and/or process that is being considered. Those that cannot live with the issue should be, at minimum, replaced with a new team member.

The Work of the Team - The "Task Accomplishment" Process

Having an objective is of little value in and of itself. Objectives become achievable when a process, a series of interconnected tasks, a series of behaviors, is defined that leads to the accomplishment of the objective. It is amazing to me that so many individuals often say, "If I had only done..., I would be...". It is common for all of us to look at ourselves historically and reflect on our lack of clear objectives and our lack of action steps that would lead to the achievement of those objectives.

Yet, simultaneously, we do not learn from our mistakes nor create objectives to achieve in the future. Nor do we create the action steps - the processes - that would lead to the accomplishment of those future objectives. Instead we tend to languish in our pasts trying to sort out the reasons for our present situation.

The Choices

The essence of effective team performance lies in our ability to achieve the stated objective using a "task accomplishment" process that all team members have clarity and consensus about. What objective a team takes on should be driven by the opportunities that exist to improve organizational performance. What specific "task accomplishment" process the team uses should be the one that is most appropriate to achieve the objective at hand. For example, the following objectives and corresponding processes can all be appropriate to assign to a team given the organizational situation and improvement opportunities that exist.

Task Accomplishment Process Table

Objective	Task Accomplishment Process
<p>To provide organizational members a vision of what the organization desires to achieve, what objectives are to be achieved, and what values organizational members will use to guide their decision-making.</p> <p>To provide organizational members a sense of what changes in the competitive, technological, political, regulatory, demographic, or market environment mean for changes in the organization's behavior.</p>	Strategic Analysis & Planning
<p>To determine what the organization's mission, responsibilities, and resulting process needs are.</p>	Organizational Mission Analysis
<p>To satisfy the true needs of the customer.</p> <p>To deploy through the organization process objectives that cumulatively provide the means to satisfy the true needs of the customer.</p>	Quality Function Deployment
<p>Improve the throughput of customer satisfying units</p>	Process Performance Improvement
<p>To create clarity and consensus about the process</p>	Detailed Process Definition
<p>To understand the degree to which the process is achieving its quality and throughput objectives.</p>	Process Performance Information System Installation
<p>To solve a process problem in a systematic and data based fashion</p>	The SPC Problem Solving Process
<p>To identify and select the best alternative to change the system to.</p>	The Process Redesign Process
<p>To identify in rank order the constraints of the process being studied to insure that investment in or improvement of the process provides the biggest “bang for the buck”.</p>	The Constraint Analysis Process
<p>To change the behavior of individuals, teams, and departments of an organization so that collectively the organization is changed to the desired behavior.</p>	The Organizational Change Process

Other examples may include a survey-guided development process designed to gather information from organizational members that will lead to organization-wide problem solving. Another example might be a training process that is designed to develop and create the demonstration of new skills or knowledge on the job. Project management might also be an

appropriate process for implementing a new capital project or other technology based implementation. Yet, another may be the use of brainstorming methods to develop a large number of ideas on a given issue. The number of objectives and corresponding processes are many.

As you can see, there are a variety of objectives that a team can be assigned to achieve, each with a suggested task accomplishment process for achieving that given objective. The number of objectives is countless and is only limited by the ability of the organization to envision or identify new opportunities. So it is, as well, with the number or variety of processes that can be brought to bear to achieve the objective.

The task accomplishment process that is used not only serves as the means to achieve the objective, it also is one of two things that provide the basis for role clarity for individuals. Knowing what the overall task accomplishment process is and anticipating what their assignment will be to each step of the task accomplishment process helps individuals within the team know more succinctly what their role is in the team.

Clarity and Consensus About Group Norms

The second significant item that provides role clarity for each individual within the team is the group norms. Even given a high degree of clarity and consensus about the group's objective and associated task accomplishment process, inefficiencies can show up quickly if the group does not have agreement about how each individual will behave with other group members in the group. These behavioral agreements are called "Group Norms".

Group norms are a set of rules of conduct for both individuals and for the group's functioning that provides a structure for effectively holding meetings, effectively communicating with each other, effectively maximizing the contribution that each make to the team, and that effectively keeps the individuals of the team disciplined to the task accomplishment process and achievement of its objective.



"Robert's Rules of Order" is one example of a set of rules that guide or structure the group management process. These rules provide the facilitator and the other team members a structure for team meetings, making proposals, considering proposals, discussing issues, and for decision-making. Other less formal rules of order, such as a brainstormed list of what is acceptable and not acceptable behavior during a meeting, can also be quite effective in maintaining order within the team or group meeting.

Deciding with the team about what group norms are appropriate is also an aspect to the group management process. Meeting times, length of meetings, meeting break policies, tardiness or

absentee policies, interruption policies, smoking policies, rotation of routine team chores, etc. are all examples of group norms.

The group management process is nothing more than the behavior that results by accepting a uniform code of conduct that structures how meetings are conducted and how people will interact and relate to each other during the team's functioning.

Reasonable and Responsible Interpersonal Behaviors

One aspect of group norms that needs to be addressed is the idea of responsible and reasonable interpersonal behavior. Certain individual skill sets are needed to insure the effective and efficient communication of ideas in non-conflictual fashions. These skills aid individuals in their discussion and decision-making. These skills include:

- 1) Asking for clarification on unclear issues.
- 2) Acting as a gatekeeper to insure equal participation.
- 3) Showing courteous behavior by talking one at a time, avoiding interruptions, and avoiding "sideline" discussions.
- 4) Focusing the attention for problems on the system, the process, not on the individual.
- 5) Clearly and succinctly stating your position, opinion, or idea.
- 6) Actively listening to one another.
- 7) Summarizing what has been said to insure understanding and to check for accuracy before stating your own position, idea, or opinion.
- 8) Containing digression when lengthy or irrelevant discussion is present.
- 9) Managing time to insure that the meeting's agenda is disciplined to.
- 10) Keeping commitments such as action plan time lines.
- 11) Making requests knowing you have the right to make them and that others have the right to do them, not do them, or that they will get back to you on whether they will do them or not if they don't know now.
- 12) Testing for consensus to insure that you are not off track.
- 13) Constantly evaluating the meeting's progress and taking corrective action.
- 14) Providing or receiving constructive feedback in a non-confrontational fashion.

Although some of these skills seem to be more in the domain of the leader or facilitator of the team, all team members should know these skills and discipline themselves to the demonstration of these interpersonal skills. The foundation of these interpersonal skills lies in the two old sayings. Treat others the way that you would like to be treated yourself. Expect from others no more than

you would expect from yourself. If we were to integrate these two values in ourselves, many of the aforementioned skills would show up naturally.

Clarity and Consensus About Each Person's Role

Given that a group's objective exists, that the task accomplishment process has been identified, that group norms have been established, and that clarity and consensus exists for all three of these issues, the leader and/or facilitator can now begin to determine what each person's role is in collectively accomplishing the objective.

In any situation where role definition is being focused on, one must always remember that the task accomplishment process itself is the starting point for defining the roles of the people involved. The activity or work of the process is what accomplishes the objective. The roles people have within the process are designed to facilitate the effective and efficient operation of the task accomplishment process as it accomplishes the objective.



However, one should also consider a number of other issues as well when defining roles, but the definition of the task accomplishment process is the preeminent driver. The other issues can include:

- The group norms of the group
- The degree resources are available for people to do whatever work is defined for them
- The competency of each of the people involved
- The experience of those involved
- The degree that any one individual is willing to assume responsibility for their role assignments.

Once roles are defined for the group, remember that the accomplishment of the objective through the task accomplishment process is the primary goal. Consequently, there is no reason to “make sacred” any of these role definitions. In fact, it may be valuable to change these role definitions to other acceptable role definition alternatives on a regular basis to help minimize the “sacredness” of any one of these definitions.

Examples For Creating Role Clarity

There are a variety of ways in which one could establish role clarity for the individuals involved in some small group that has been assigned a specific objective. Look at the following table for some ideas:

Situation	Tool
Short term project	Project Scope Action Plan
Meeting	Meeting Agenda
Job	Standard Operating Procedure Detailed Process Definition

See Appendix B for examples of the tools found in the above table.

Clarity and Consensus About The Consequences of Personal Choice

Employees expect to find a link between accountability and consequence and most importantly chose it when they signed up with your organization. The link between self-control, result, and consequence is unbreakable if the leader and facilitator have managed the aforementioned elements of the group management process successfully and have stated clearly that the consequences they experience are a result of their own personal choices. They are not the result of management decision-making.



Yes, management does make decisions about the system, strategy, etc. But when dealing with accountable people, accountable people are choosing their own consequence in a full knowing fashion. They know if they are late that their pay will be docked appropriately and that they lose eligibility for the bonus profit sharing program. They know if they slack off and make bad product that the cost of the lost materials and lost revenue will be offset by profit sharing funds. And if, employees do not like the consequences they are experiencing they know they can change their behavior with full knowledge that their consequence will change.

Leader Administers Consequence

It is not appropriate for the facilitator to provide or administer all forms of consequence. If a team member is totally uncontrollable in the team setting, the facilitator may find that they cannot do anything and must refer the situation to the manager.

If the team member is chosen not to participate in total, it is the manager/leader who must provide the appropriate consequence.

Any situation in which it the team member behavior skirts or is actually in contrast to the stated policies of the organization must be dealt with by the manager.

Facilitator Administers Consequence

However, there is lots of ways that a facilitator can administer consequences within the team setting. For example, if team members are habitually late, the team can setup a group norm (if there is clarity and consensus) that fines those who are later. If a group norm exists that states only one person at a time can speak, if the norm is broke the facilitator can call on the offenders and remind them of the norm in several effective ways that create a sense of consequence and get the team members back to staying disciplined to the norms.

If a team member doesn't follow through on an assignment, that member knows that they have chosen to be publicly singled out in the meeting in some fashion. And of course, they might also know that their lack of getting the work done may lead to a private meeting with the leader/manager of the team.

The issue is, create clarity about their role and the consequence for following or not following through on their expectations. When the team member decides what to do...well, he or she knows right then what consequence they have chosen to experience.

Competency Development

To create this competency many feel that elaborate training initiatives must be undertaken. In most situations, training isn't really necessary – what is missing is clear job definition. However, the facilitator still must insure that people do understand how to perform in the task at hand. Sometimes training seminars are necessary. Sometimes having a person “hang out” with someone who is competent is beneficial. Sometimes providing a person a book, a procedural manual, etc. is satisfactory. Sometimes creating simulators for people to practice on is helpful. There is a host of potential ways to create competency among jobholders. Do what is appropriate.



But, always remember that training and/or competency development, in and by itself, is a waste of time. When competency development is directly linked to some task that the person needs to do, the effort is much more successful. The manner in which you provide these learning opportunities should be appropriate for the people involved and the learning process should also be effective and efficient in creating the competency that is needed. And, if training is needed – do it; if it is not – don't bother.

Willingness Development

New team members often times are quite competent and want to work successfully on the team project. But, once in a while, you will find those are a bit afraid or apprehensive about working the project. They have a fear of some type that constrains their participation level or causes them to procrastinate. We might conclude in these circumstances that the person is just unwilling to work on the team objective. However, it might not be unwillingness in the "I don't want to" way, but unwillingness due to fear.

Given this, it is important to understand or at least assume that most people want to do the right thing and will if the system enables them to. But also, they have to have the courage to do things that maybe they have never done before. In these situations, the facilitator can help by being supportive, detail oriented with the team member, pairing the member up with an experienced member, etc.

If the member really just doesn't want to be on the team and is unwilling to try – that is a choice – a personal choice – that leads to some consequence that isn't particular favorable to the individual involved.

Resource Provision

Another critical part of this group management process enables people to do the desired work successfully. It involves having that right resources available to use when they need them. If we want individuals to setup data collection systems, people must know what the data collection system is, have the time and tools to collect the information, and have the time to analyze the data. If we want operators to use control charts on their machine centers, they must not only know its expected and have the competency to do so, but they also must have a control chart form and calculator or a computer based control chart. They must have the sampling tools need to acquire the samples. They must have the measurement devices needed to measure the samples. They must have the time to sample, measure, enter data, and analyze the data.



If you ask your son to mow the lawn, teach him to mow the lawn, tell him that he will not be able to do anything with his friends later if the lawn is not mowed, but provide him no gasoline to

mow the lawn, common sense would indicate that we shouldn't expect the desired work to get done. Why should it be different at work?

Active and Visible Leadership

One of the most important elements to successful team functioning is having a leader of the group who is active and visible in demonstrating his or her's sense of urgency about objective accomplishment. As they monitor the group's functioning they are constantly looking for what constrains the group from achievement of its goal. In many small group situations, the facilitator is performing this task.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Effective facilitation of a team involves managing the group management process as was discussed earlier. The facilitator focuses on several key elements that include items related to the team, to the individual, and to him or herself as the facilitator. These focuses include:

Achievement of Objective

- 1) Focus on maintaining discipline to achieve the objective.
- 2) Focus on staying disciplined to the task accomplishment process.

Building and Maintaining the Team

- 3) Focus on staying disciplined to the group norms.
- 4) Focus on providing resources and removing constraints to progress.

Selecting, Developing, and Supporting the Individual

- 5) Focus on maintaining clarity and discipline to each person's defined role.
- 6) Focus on providing the appropriate competency development opportunities.
- 7) Focus on providing the kind of support and encouragement needed to develop confidence and willingness to work.

The Facilitator (him or herself) – Self Control

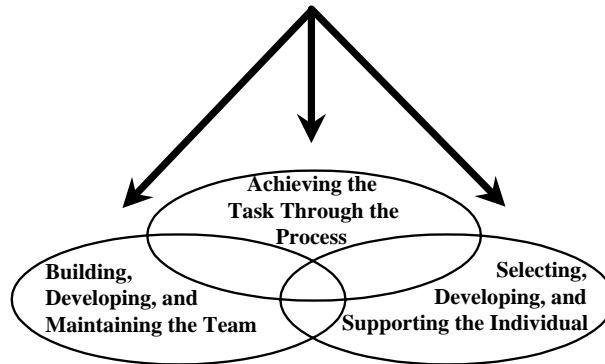
- 8) Focus on maintaining personal discipline to the group management process.

The only difference between the team members and the facilitator for the above-mentioned elements is the fact that the facilitator has the additional charge of maintaining and improving on the integrity of each one of these elements. In addition, the facilitator is the go between with the sponsoring manager and the team leader for asking for resources and/or organizational constraint removal. Finally, the facilitator's purpose is to keep the group management process operating effectively and efficiently.

To accomplish these ends, the facilitator is constantly monitoring and finding balance between the objective/process, the team, and the individual. He or she assumes that same heli-view position as does an effective leader except that the facilitator is focused primarily on the group management process (assuming that a distinct team leader is present).

Heli-View Leadership

Leader's Balanced Focus



Modification For Improved Probability of Success

As the facilitator leads the team, observes what is happening with task accomplishment, the performance of the team overall, the performance of any given individual, or their own performance as a facilitator, improvement opportunities will be seen. Essentially, when you see them, the fix to the opportunity will more than likely be one of the following alternatives:

- Reestablish clarity and consensus about the objective, task accomplishment process, norms, roles, and/or consequences
- Provide other resources
- Develop new competency
- Develop new willingness
- Provide appropriate consequence given personal choice

The Biggest Fear of a Facilitator – Managing People Situations

Of course, the biggest fear of any facilitator, supervisor, leader, or anybody in the forefront of the group is the fear of having to deal with people situations that are “problematic”. There are times when people within a group are angry. No one, even a trained experienced facilitator wants to deal with that. There are times when people can potentially have their feelings hurt. Again, no trained and experienced facilitator wants to deal with that. And, there are even times when some group members will attack, subvert, and deliberately sabotage the group’s interactions and progress. No one, experienced or not, wants to deal with that either.

However, knowing what can happen, being capable of sensing when these events might happen, and having an understanding of what to do when these events occur can enable any facilitator, supervisor, leader, parent, etc. get through these difficult situations successfully. Unfortunately, dealing with difficult situations is not about controlling someone else – it is more important to display self-control and discipline yourself to the appropriate strategy given the upsetting situation.

Other Facilitator Situations

There are a variety of situations that a facilitator can find themselves faced with and should expect to be faced with that go beyond just people problems as mentioned above. There is no such thing as a perfect team a most of the situations will be faced sooner or later by a facilitator over time. A facilitator should explore the use of heli-view management and the situational leadership model to aid in diagnosing and adjusting the group management process. A complete listing of the potential situations that a facilitator could face is impossible. However, in the following list are some of the more common situations one might face in the role:

- 1) Lack of objective achievement.
- 2) Lack of a task accomplishment process to achieve the objective.
- 3) Lack of a group management process to provide the infrastructure for team functioning.
- 4) Lack of clarity, consensus, or discipline to the above.
- 5) Lack of leader emergence.
- 6) Lack of participation intensity.
- 7) Presence of groupthink.
- 8) Sideline conversations during group discussion.
- 9) Lack of demonstrating responsible and reasonable interpersonal skills.
- 10) Withdrawn behaviors of an individual.
- 11) Unacknowledged contribution and resulting "hurt".

- 12) Defensive behaviors.
- 13) Attributing behavior to person rather than to system, process, or policies.
- 14) Feuding between team members.
- 15) Sniping behaviors.

Other situations may also occur that the facilitator will need to deal with. Examples might include difficulty acquiring needed resources, resolving conflict with other teams, or assisting the group recovery from a mistake or failure.

However daunting this particular situation is, discipline to and use of the group management process will take care of 80 to 90% of these problems. It sounds simplistic, but often the true root cause of these situations is much more simple than what one might imagine.

Conclusion

So what is facilitation? Defining facilitation as both a linear and nonsequenced set of behaviors that influence the behavior of a group to achieve an objective with a defined process seems to provide the utility that many might find useful.