

maximize meeting value and optimize results

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Meetings are the bane of organizational existence. How can you increase the return on investment of all the time and money spent on them? Simple: use a facilitator.

What is a facilitator?

"To facilitate" means to make something easy. In business, a facilitator is a skilled professional who eases tasks involving important conversations with two or more persons, such as planning, problem-solving, developing teams, setting goals, resolving conflicts, identifying corporate values, creating an organizational mission or determining criteria for selecting new business partners.

Why bother using one?

A facilitator creates a safe, productive meeting environment, allowing for conversations that engage participants more fully. Improved efficiency, wiser decisions, greater commitment to action and, ultimately, better outcomes result. Facilitators apply flexible processes to resolve complex issues; mitigate power imbalances; allow junior participants to offer opinions without fear of reprisal; ensure that conversations focus on issues, not personal agendas; adapt to required changes in direction; move people back on task when they wander; and, afterwards, help ensure that clients keep the commitments they've made.

What to seek in a facilitator

Look for facilitators who are great communicators, observant, flexible, quick to learn, client-focused, politically savvy and broadly experienced. They should have many proven group processes upon which to draw and be able to blend them together seamlessly. They should

have the courage to deliver tough messages that clients need to hear (even if they do not wish to). Ideally, they use humour in skilful ways to energize and engage participants while they're working toward desired outcomes.

Are all facilitators created equal?

As in any field, no two facilitators are identical, nor is anyone appropriate for every client. Facilitators have different strengths. One may be wonderful at rigorously following a tight, minute-to-minute agenda, while another may have an exceptional ability to shift gears quickly to follow issues of organizational value. Some develop depth and expertise in one or two specific industries, whereas others work across a wide range

thus builds long before the meeting even begins. Allow the facilitator to draw upon a wide range of his or her experiences and to recommend processes and technologies for helping groups reach desired objectives.

A final agenda should be mutually agreed upon and distributed to participants. If you wish the facilitator to take on additional tasks such as reporting, follow-up or ongoing support after the meeting, you should agree on such additional elements in advance.

Can't afford a facilitator?

Ask yourself whether you can afford the cost of fixing the mistakes that result from an unsuccessful or unproductive meeting. Weigh the cost of a facilitator

Facilitators can help you achieve positive outcomes and save time, money and aggravation

of industries and organizations. Do your due diligence by talking to a few different facilitators (and their clients!) to find the one who best suits your needs.

How to work with a facilitator

To gain maximum value from your investment in a facilitator, work closely with him or her well ahead of time to ensure good understanding of the organization's issues and culture and the desired outcomes for the meeting. This process may include interviews with key stakeholders. Appoint an executive committee or a representative sample of the meeting's participants to help plan and organize the meeting. Buy-in to the meeting's purpose and process

against work hours lost if your team has to go back to the drawing board time and time again. Relative to the cost of bringing people together for a meeting in the first place, the incremental cost of a facilitator is invariably a wise investment.

Some organizations use internal facilitators to reduce costs or capitalize on corporate insights. In many cases, this decision is prudent. Yet when meetings are likely to involve large egos, high stakes, complexity, multiple levels of the organization, large numbers of participants, tension or low degrees of trust, using experienced, skilled facilitators can greatly increase the likelihood of positive outcomes, saving you time, money and irritation. **H2**