

EQUITY IN THE PANEL PROCESS: THE ART OF FACILITATION

A facilitator is an individual whose job is to help manage a process of information exchange. While an expert's role is to offer advice particularly about the content of a discussion, the facilitator's role is to help with how the discussion is proceeding. The facilitator's responsibility is to address the journey, rather than the destination.

When facilitating, you might consider the following:

Competencies - The facilitator:

- distinguishes process from content
- manages expectations and prepares thoroughly
- uses time and space intentionally
- is skilled in evoking participation and creativity
- practiced in honoring the group and affirming its wisdom capable of maintaining objectivity
- skilled in reading the underlying dynamics of the group adapts to the changing situation
- assumes (or shares) responsibility for the group journey demonstrates professionalism, self-confidence and authenticity maintains personal integrity
- releases preconceived notions and resolutions

Characteristics - The facilitator commits to a style of:

- asking rather than telling
- building relationships rather than solely task-oriented
- asking for other's opinions rather than primarily offering their own
- negotiating rather than dictating decision-making
- listening without interrupting
- being emotionally engaged but able to be restrained when required
- acting with sufficient confidence to look people in the eye when talking with them bringing energy to the process rather than only absorbing it
- natural curiosity about people, things, ideas and life
- keeping the big picture in mind while working on the smaller details

If you have a natural task-oriented style you may find it difficult to be thrust in a situation where facilitating with a fluid approach is more appropriate. You may have to give up the expert position in a group and consider facilitating rather than running the meeting. The facilitator assumes the group's perspective rather than maintaining their own.

Conflict

Conflict is a normal part of any individual, group or organizational dynamic -expect it and prepare for it. Establish group agreements and a common understanding of how the group will communicate. Conflict is neither good nor bad, it just is.

When conflict happens, remember:

- When conflict does arise, do not ignore it. Addressing conflict early on can alleviate many tensions;
- Conflict happens in stages; from minor discomfort to incidents, and *f left unchecked it can escalate to a crisis;
- Non-verbal cues are as important (or possibly more important) as verbal cues;
- Key into the moods, energy and attitude of participants and establish direct ways of checking in with the group. How is everyone doing/feeling?
- Identifying the sources of the conflict may help in determining a resolution;
- Your communication style can influence how a conflict is perceived;
- Identity and social location inform:
 - How dynamics and individuals involved in the conflict are perceived;
 - How actions and interactions are perceived
 - How conflict arises and are resolved

(3/2018 -adapted from the Institute of Cultural Affairs, Canada; artEquity; TCG EDI Resource; Dealing with Challenging People: The Manager's Toolkit, TCG; The Role of the Facilitator: Understanding What Facilitators Really Do, Robert Bacall