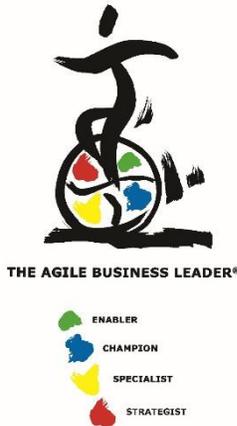


## Agile Leadership through Facilitation in the Workplace

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Have you ever attended a meeting, conference, seminar, or group gathering that you felt was inefficient or a waste of your time?

If you answered yes to this question you are not alone. Most meetings are run poorly and waste a lot of time and cause confusion in communication. In our role as consultant and facilitator we have observed far too many meetings across the globe where there were several people were in attendance and only a few of them needed to be there or were actually engaged in the meeting. We have seen meetings cause frustration, more confusion and use up valuable time. In many cases meetings achieve the sole outcome, a date and time for the next meeting causing a total waste of time and of human resources.

There are plenty of books written to guide you on how to run a meeting. They include, creating an agenda, how to capture information and some techniques for brainstorming and problem solving. These basic meeting techniques often exclude how to use and benefit from the most important ingredient in the room – the INTELLECTUAL AND EMOTIONAL HORSEPOWER of the people attending the meeting.

Facilitators go beyond using “meeting rules” to manage meetings. They use their knowledge and talent to accentuate and manage the capabilities of the group to ensure everyone contributes and feels that their contribution is valued. A facilitator knows what meeting processes will be best to use to leverage the diversity of the group’s competence and achieve the desired outcome. A facilitator efficiently and effectively leads a group to achieve greater results.

### So what is a “FACILITATOR”?

Facilitators leverage the knowledge and wisdom of the group who have come together to meet. They encourage openness to the emergence of new ideas and perspectives brought to the table, because they have helped to create an environment where all people are valued and all relevant information is important to consider. Facilitators monitor communication at the meeting to help involve others, clarify ideas and engage everyone in the outcomes. They recognize the value of inclusiveness and focus on incorporating the opinions of others as part of the decision-making process.

### Leaders as facilitators

When leaders use facilitation skills a more engaging and productive result occurs. The facilitative leader enables people to get things done in a highly effective and motivated way. Unfortunately we have found leaders possessing this facilitative skill to be the most misunderstood leadership competency across the world.

In general phraseology in the business world of leadership, the word “facilitator” is used to describe a plethora of activities from chairing meetings to mediating a debate. Unlike being authoritative and dominant, facilitation often isn’t considered a strong and valuable skill of a leader. Our experience finds quite the opposite. Leaders who use facilitation skills in the workplace create exponentially faster results in all organisational contexts. Facilitation is the essence of collaborative leadership, building accountability and helping the organization succeed.

The following table presents a comparison of the different roles of a facilitative leader.

	Consultant	Coach	Educator Trainer	Leader	Manager	Mentor	Facilitator	Mediator
Approach	Discusses	Personalized and guides	Educates	Promote Changes	Formal and tells	Tailored and accompanies	Neutral and Guides	Neutral and Guides
Works with	Clients	Clients	Groups	Followers	Staff	Mentee	Small and large groups	Small and large groups
Knows and Understands	What others have done	How to ask the right questions	Contents	End Result	Content	End Result	Neutrality, conflict resolution, group process and dynamics methods	Neutrality, facilitation skills, mediation process and negotiation skills
Depends on	Past experience of self and others	Self-awareness of client	Research, current information	Personal abilities	System	Past experience of self and others	Ability of group	Ability of those involved
Time Frame	Short term	Long term	Program specific	Long term	Short term	Long term	Adaptable	Mediation specific
Purpose	Development	Growth of other person	Skill proficiency	Strategic goals	Maintenance of system	Success and advance	Reach group's desired outcome through discover (from the start of the process and before a conflict arises)	Resolve an existing conflict where a prior solution could not be reached
Focus	Transfer expert knowledge of a specific professional field	Personal and professional development	Transferring knowledge	Providing purpose, direction, and motivation for followers	Ensuring the operation of the project or process runs smoothly	Transferring knowledge and exposing 'mentee' to your network	Achieve a task by helping the group collaborate and communicate clearly for open discussion	Resolve a conflict by following a structured format while using analytical skills to assist in resolution

The benefit of this understanding this table is to provide is to clearly grasp that there a different intentions and approaches for someone using the skills of a facilitator.

When pragmatists talk about facilitation they are usually referring to what we describe as capital “F” facilitation i.e. the facilitator is in a process-positive and content-neutral role. That means they present themselves to the group as a neutral facilitator whose primary role is to guide the group to its desired outcome without contributing any input, thoughts or ideas into the topic being discussed. In a purely “F” role the facilitator does not need to know any content in order to manage the process of the meeting. Agile Leadership involves a person using small “f” facilitation meeting techniques. The Agile Leader using facilitation skills takes a more praxis approach. They practically apply the theories and techniques of facilitation to achieve the end goal of action.

Being an Agile facilitative leader demands that you leverage the knowledge and wisdom that is available to you. If you have all the answers and know how to get people to do a job based on your knowledge and wisdom then you are a MANAGER or an Authoritative Leader and probably a pretty good one. This is not however Agile Leadership.

Our experience is the expectations of workers are changing. Whether you are hiring the Millennials) (born 1980 to 1995) or highly experienced workers who are aware they could get another job elsewhere, all workers are beginning to; expect respect, desire to be valued for the talents and knowledge they were hired for and want to understand the purpose and vision of the organization so they can have an impact on the results. Agile Leaders who use facilitation skills will accelerate the move towards organisational agility if they are enable their employees to do so. As an Agile leader you can leverage this natural need for collaboration, respect and involvement by using facilitation skills.

The global economy is requiring leaders to deal with the people side of business or more specifically the ‘human capital’ versus the ‘financial capital’ side of business. The reality is, if leaders do not incorporate more facilitative skills they may be forced to deal with massive churn rates in their workforce. Working effectively with your staff is good for business. Dealing with recruiting and termination is expensive and often not necessary.

Leaders in all levels of the organization must deal with a range of responses from the people along the continuum of ‘early adopters’ to ‘brick walls’. Facilitative leaders incorporate the energy, excitement and innovation of the “early adopters” type employees. –Those employees who initiate momentum, build new change efforts and want to make a difference for the better. Early adopters happily take on change and, if they feel valued and recognised, can become advocates for the change effort. Facilitating these catalyst requires openness, communicating vision and agility. The ‘brick wall’ type employee have either been in the organisation for many years, are good at doing ‘their job’, have no desire to rock the boat and want to avoid conflict AND anything new or different.

The Chinese might refer to this type of behaviour as “A gee bok” which means to have shoulders in the shape of a capital ‘A’ so that any ‘issues’ that descend on them simply slide off on to someone else.



The 'brick walls' people can be valuable in the organization because they bring stability, a sense of history and a desire to honor what is working well and therefore does not need to change. Facilitating these conservationists requires empathy, clearly understanding their fears and needs and helping them see the benefit of becoming more agile.

Agile Leaders using facilitative skills, understand the dynamics of groups and know the best way to connect with the range of employees they work with from the 'early adopters' to the 'brick walls'.

When leaders are skilled at facilitation they provide the opportunity for people to achieve outstanding performance. They are resilient to breaks in communication channels because they have strong collaboration skills and continually search out ways for engaging the masses and building organizations that continually learn, adapt, evolve and improve. They don't get stuck on the petty details or emotional dramas that can weigh down the success of an outcome. Rather they have the innate ability to impart a sense of invincibility, power and control over the situation. They tap into secret chambers of the minds, hearts and souls of people and know which buttons to push to ensure team, trust, drive and perseverance. Facilitation is not about authority it's about respect, influence and loyalty. The facilitative leader convinces people to get on board and stay on board because they make people feel good about themselves and what they're accomplishing.

By using their facilitation skills ABLs tap into others' potential. They create safe environments which encourage people to speak their mind even if it's an unpopular viewpoint. Agile leaders recognize that collaboration is an intellectual endeavor involving the creation of mutual goals. They facilitate discussions so that everyone feels heard and everyone understands who is responsible for action developed. This behavior creates ENGAGEMENT and positive successful results

Engaged employees are fully involved in and enthusiastic about their work. They are inspired by their work. They care about the future of the company and are willing to invest in the effort to see and feel that successful. What more could an organization want? For us at Evans & Peck, this sounds like a perfect business case for why more leaders should learn facilitation skills.

When you think about how you could become more of an Agile Meeting Leader, consider incorporating the 4 Gold Standard P's of meeting facilitation in the workplace.

### **P**repare yourself

- Understand your style and the impact it has on the group and individual's preferences.
- Recognize your strengths and determine how to best use them.
- Decide what additional support or resources you might need to make the meeting a success.

### **P**lan the event

- Consider how you will generate contribution by all.
- Ensure that the meeting room is conducive to the type of meeting results you want.
- Be very clear on what outcomes must be achieved.

- Decide who should be attend the meeting. (Often people come to a meeting when they don't really need to be there).
- Create a realistic timed agenda which includes communicating the purpose and outcomes of the meeting along with topics to be covered.

## **P**erform with Agility

- Open with purpose, intent and empathy.
- Agree the decision making process to be used in the meeting (will it be voting, consensus or decision by the leader with input from the group).
- Manage the energy of the group.
- Show you are listening and encourage others to listen.
- Manage conflict constructively and transform it towards achieving the meeting outcome.
- Evoke creativity and innovation from the talent and wisdom in the room.
- Record decisions in the form of action plans with completion dates and who will be responsible for the completion of the task.
- Respect the diversity of the group. Modelling this type of behavior will help others do the same.
- Clearly and concisely end the meeting with an understanding of what has been achieved and what needs to happen for moving forward.

## **P**rovide recognition

- Encourage positive behavior by acknowledging what is working well and how the current situation can help with the future.
- Celebrate the success of the group's achievements.