

Competencies Needed for Expert Group Facilitation

This handout discusses the results of a study that was done on the characteristics of group facilitators who were considered to be experts at facilitation. The groups used for the study had the following characteristics:

- Groups dealing with complex problems such as strategic planning,
- Groups where conflict was anticipated due to conflicting goals of different participants,
- Groups in which the facilitator needed significant knowledge surrounding the goals, processes, and organizational environment that the group related to
- Groups in which the facilitator was expected to demonstrate knowledge of related theories, creativity, and decision-making related to the issues at hand
- Groups that involved between 15 and 50 participants
- Often the expert facilitator was in the process of leading and/or coaching a less experienced facilitator
- Groups where their group process was in infancy and required coaching and feedback to help the process improve
- Groups where the objective was complex and challenging
- Groups where the facilitator had to stretch and motivate the participants both intellectually and behaviorally
- The facilitator would have a short lead time (sometimes only 24 hours notice) before the group commenced

*****DO THESE SOUND LIKE
FAMILIAR GROUP CHARACTERISTICS
AND REQUIREMENTS??*****

Interpersonal skills needed

Verbal	Negotiating
Non-verbal	Flexibility
Written	Recognize conflict
Questioning	Resolve conflict
Active listening	Transform conflict
Perceptive listening	Leadership
Empathy	Motivate others to achieve goals
Summarizing/paraphrasing	Motivate others to participate creatively
Sensitivity to group	Recognize/reward achievement
Sensitivity to underlying emotions	Model neutrality
Culturally aware	Build relationships
Encourage participation	

The expert facilitators were frequently seen as being "able to do it all" almost simultaneously. This juggling act was summarized by the acronym LEAPS:

L - Listen

E - Empathize

A - Ask

P - Paraphrase

S - Summarize

- Expert facilitators demonstrated a natural leadership, but they led from behind versus traditional leadership, which is from the front.
- The competency deemed least important to effective facilitation was "to recognize and reward achievement."
- Expert facilitators were able to demonstrate greater sensitivity, intuitiveness, and empathy than less expert facilitators.

Personal characteristics needed:

Adaptability
Intellectual agility
Trustworthiness
Results motivation

Objectivity
Emotionally resilient
Self aware
Self-development

- The two most important personal characteristics for expert facilitators were adaptability and emotional resiliency
- The strongest link was found between expert facilitators and high emotional intelligence.

Successful groups facilitated by expert facilitators were described as:

- The facilitator had a lightness of touch - we knew where we were aiming for and he gently nudged and steered us there, without us really noticing
- The pace was just right - there were lots of useful discussions, everything we did had a purpose and we were meeting the targets we had set for the day
- Very clear verbal communication with good use of words, language and tone
- Sees, infers and acts upon non-verbal communication, using wide of knowledge of theoretical models
- Perceptive listening, using sense and intuition to elicit meanings and emotions
- Can use cultural awareness to work with the group
- Demonstrates greater empathy and sensitivity to the group
- Influences the client and group to stretch and challenge themselves
- Works flexibly with the group's suggestions
- Capable of resolving challenging conflicts
- Can lead the group using both directive and facilitative leadership styles
- Can model neutrality and also adapt to consultant, trainer, manager and coach roles seamlessly
- Capable of building relationships with client

- Manages the physical environment to make it conducive to participation and creativity, using theoretical knowledge
- Demonstrates high intellectual agility
- Assimilates information quickly
- Uses an intellectual framework to manage feedback
- A good understanding of the context
- Has extra-organizational awareness and can take helicopter view
- Knowledge of change management, learning theories, organizational development, decision theory, and systems thinking
- High intellectual agility seen as quick thinking on their feet and understanding information quickly
- Can gain high levels of trust from the client and group
- Very self confident, with strategies to manage their weaknesses
- Very emotionally resilient and stress tolerant
- Very self-aware

Taken from: [High-Performing \(and Threshold\) Competencies for Group Facilitators](#). Stewart, Jean-Anne; Journal of Change Management, Vol 6(4), Dec 2006. pp. 417-439.