



National Managers' Community

La communauté nationale des gestionnaires

Facile...



*the art of
cultivating
facilitative moments
through leadership*



*Manager's
Reference*

Canada 

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through leadership*

The National Managers' Community is supported by a Secretariat and a Council made up of representatives from regional manager networks and the National Capital Region. They provide leadership and support to managers across the Federal Public Service by acting as an advocate, facilitator and information broker.

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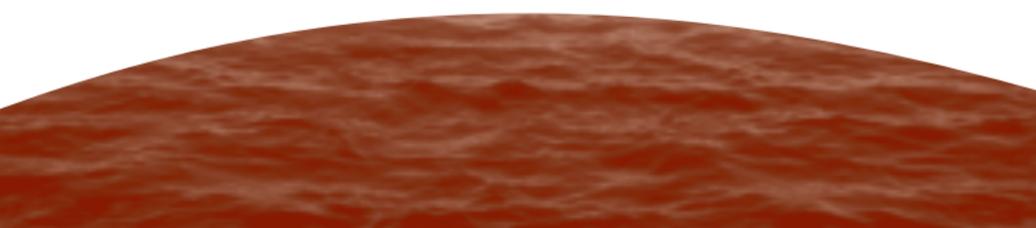
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***Facilitation:
A Manager's
Definition***

Today's public service manager is under a lot of pressure. You are being asked to do more with less. Your workload, and that of your staff have reached a critical mass. Change is constant. Accountabilities are increasing and being delegated downward.

On top of this, you may still be working in a culture strongly influenced by the past. You understand that you are primarily managing knowledge, yet the system was designed to manage widget production. Command and control may still live in your building. You are looking for help. You want to be able to solve problems more effectively. You want faster and better decision making. You need more focused and effective meetings.

You know that work in the public service is usually done in groups or teams and you need to help these teams become more productive. You need:

- More time;
- Better planning;
- More effective thinking;
- Stronger working relationships with your staff;
- To open up possibilities not shut down ideas; and,
- To get to action much sooner.

Frankly, you need someone to help you make things simpler yet more effective.

It may be time for you to search out one of your best allies in the organization - the facilitator/practitioner you heard about in your building up on the seventh floor.

For years the facilitator in the organization was somewhat marginalized, lumped in with the training programs and one of the first to be cut when the hard times hit.

The modern manager is starting to recognize that a more contemporary approach to facilitation may be the answer for better ways to manage. Modern comptrollership is primarily about managing people. Facilitation is the art of getting your people focused, more quickly and more enthusiastically on task. Facilitation helps groups and work teams achieve success by aligning the following three key elements.

PURPOSE: The *Why*: Reason for being/goal to pursue.

PROCESS: The *How*: Methods to achieve the Goal / PURPOSE.

PEOPLE: The *Who*: The role the facilitator and the participants' play in the **PROCESS** which will lead them towards achieving the **PURPOSE**.

As a manager you will find that Facilitation Values are in line with leadership values:

- Valid and relevant information shared by all;
- Everyone is a full participant;
- All points of view are recognized;
- People's time is valuable;
- Hierarchy is left at the door;
- Inclusion and respect for diversity is paramount; and,
- The group **OWNS** the process and the outcomes.

Without these core values you will not have facilitation, you will be running a meeting. The facilitator's role is to help you, get results and manage the process effectively. Facilitation tools and techniques such as the *Challenge Wall*, *Problem Analysis* and *Decision Matrix*, provide a framework for thinking and deciding together so that you will get from A to B with your group.

A brilliant agenda and a solid process are not enough to make magic happen at the meeting. It is all about people: the participants and their willingness to fully contribute; and, the facilitator and his/her ability to be an effective role model. The facilitator models the facilitation values of inclusiveness, respect, honesty, and creates the right environment for meaningful and productive conversations. So facilitation is more than knowledge and expertise, it is a way of "being" as much as a way of "doing". Much like the realm of managing is about the "doing" - doing things right; and the challenge of true leadership is about "walking the talk", the "being" - doing the right things.

When you partner with a facilitator you will be able to shift from the doing to the being. This partnership gives you an opportunity to be fully present with your people rather than focusing on the task and the process.

Process versus content

A good facilitator maintains neutrality and objectivity towards the content while bringing out the passion and commitment of the people.

Your role as a manager / client is to provide the context (your vision and values), the content and access to the right people. Managers are used to doing it all - letting go is a leadership moment.

The Call

....*The call* (part 1)

You have just come out of your boss's office. She has briefed you on the importance of getting all the stakeholders on side for a consultation meeting on a new policy renewal project. Your thoughts are going a hundred kilometers an hour. You are trying to imagine what this will look like, who is in the room, who is leading the session and whether it will be a session where people will leave fired up or in a meltdown.

Stop right there.

You need a little help.

You can find that help in a number of places. You may have heard of a skilled facilitator right in your organization. If not, you have heard that there is a community of practice for facilitators and they probably have a list of facilitators from other departments who are available to you. You could also go out into the private market, but that is another book, already written.

To make the right call you need to know your:

- objective for the meeting;
- desired outcomes;
- mandate and resources for the project;
- options for facilitator help;
- managers' networks' recommendations for facilitator expertise; and,
- own leadership role and commitment to the project.

SOME PITFALLS

TO AVOID...

- Don't panic! Call around for references on good facilitators.
- Avoid doing their job and don't let them do yours. It is a partnership: the facilitator will manage the event, you are still managing the project.

SOME GOOD TOOLS AND PRACTICES...



- Active listening.
- Be prepared, make some notes on the project.
- Brush up on your knowledge of facilitation practice.
- Check around for advice from colleagues.

Okay, you have found your first choice and you have put through the call. On to the critical conversation....

....*The call* (part 2)

This person is a very busy person often struggling to balance their passion and practice of facilitation with the demands of the regular job. You need to understand and communicate your respect for that.

They need to know, somewhat like journalists, the when, who, what, where and why of this conversation.

When? Deal with this one first. If they are booked and you have no flexibility, it will be a short call. If they are not booked and have some flexibility you can start to work things out. Make sure there is ample time on either side of the date for travel, planning and followup, if necessary.

Who? *Who is really calling this meeting?* Is it you, as the manager, your boss or perhaps an employee who called for a *Workout*? Is it clear who really needs this session to happen?

Who will be participating? What are the constraints around participants? Do you need them for knowledge requirements or do you need them for more political reasons? How open are you on who will be participating? Are you aware that keeping groups small is not always the most productive given some of the new tools and practices? Are the participants there by choice or by work requirements? Are you clear with the practitioners about any hidden agendas?

What? *What is supposed to happen here?* Is it a business meeting around a business agenda? Perhaps it is a problem solving session requiring more of a *Workout* model? Maybe it is a consultation session or a negotiation session or just a basic information session. It could also be a planning event or a decision making effort. You need to have this straight.

Where? From the perspective of your available resources, do you have a lot to spend or are you on a shoestring budget? Is it important for this to be on-site or off-site? Are you fully aware of the trade-offs, other than financial, around this decision?

On-site: Often this is a preferred option for clients because it is low cost and convenient for employees. The disadvantage to holding an on-site process is that you may lose players either because they may run back to their office to check messages and get detained or because they get called out of the session by those who need their expertise.

Off-site: Obviously, this alternative is more costly. Organizers need to budget for the rental of the meeting room, audio-visual equipment, travel, meals and accommodation (if it is an overnight event). The advantage to having an off-site meeting is that it takes people out of their normal routine and environment and allows them to be present in a different way and to participate more fully.

Why? What do you need from this event? What does success look like? What are the business objectives and what needs to happen? The practitioner will need to know all of this from your perspective.

When the call is over you will work through the details with the planning group (in partnership with your facilitator).

SOME PITFALLS TO AVOID...

- Needing to have all the answers..... right now.
- Already having a decision on the methodology or approach.
- Booking the date before you have confirmed the facilitator of your choice.

SOME GOOD TOOLS AND PRACTICES...



- Make the call as soon as you know - the key to a good meeting is good preparation.
- Have a frank and open conversation with the facilitator to see whether or not you “jive” together.

Link to Learning Organization Management...*Mental Models*

We know that one of the toughest aspects of managing in the Learning Organization approach is how we deal every-day with *Mental Models*. *Mental Models*, as you recall, are those assumptions, beliefs and attitudes that have been embedded in the workplace for years and generally go unchallenged...until you come along that is.

The art of facilitation may have been the subject of a less than favourable *Mental Model* in your organization. Perhaps it was seen as the “soft” side of management or something to make people more comfortable but not really appropriate for those difficult management issues. In this chapter you made the call to the facilitator because you have broken the *Mental Model* around facilitation. You do not accept the old *Mental Model* of “we have always done it this way.” You now manage by facilitation. You use tools, practices and trained people to tackle every challenge that comes your way, every day, not just on special occasions.

NOTES

The Planning Group

You can work through the planning stage with the practitioner, your designated planning group or a combination of both. Whatever choices are made there are a number of critical pieces to the planning stage.

Both you and the facilitator need to know:

- ***Who exactly is the client?*** Is it someone you report to? Who has the authority to approve the agenda decisions? Your role and/or that of the true client must be clear. These roles could be as a full participant, observer, or post-session decision-maker.
- ***What is the real purpose of the event?*** This part of the discussion is an opportunity for you to have an open conversation with the facilitator, who will want to know what you really need. Facilitators have often been around the block: they have been called to facilitate “input” sessions where the decisions have already been made. Often this planning conversation helps you get to the root cause of why you need this session as well.
- ***What will success look like at the end of the day?*** Learning Organization management practice and coaching often ask us to “stand in the future.” As a manager you need to have the ability to see a larger picture of success and to articulate that vision to your facilitator partner.
- ***What expectations will participants have of this session?*** You have to set a mandate (establish guidelines) for the session. Raising expectations without a mandate does a great disservice to the session and the people. These guidelines could include legislative, financial, policy and political will type boundaries. Be as clear as you are able with the facilitator.
- ***What are the logistics required for the session?*** Give the facilitator as much information as you can about how many people there will be, their familiarity with each other, their roles, your needs (presentations etc) background material, backup plans, room requirements and facilitation tools needed. This is why you brought the facilitator on board. They will have ideas for you. You do not have to use or accept them all but give them a good listen.

SOME PITFALLS TO AVOID...



- Too many hands... Joe is in charge of the audio-visual, Tina is handling the catering, George is getting the hand outs photocopied, Sue is the logistics contact with the hotel
- “We have always done it this way!”

SOME GOOD TOOLS AND PRACTICES...



- Have just one point of contact for the facilitator, someone who is given the task of coordinating the event.
- Stay involved - ask for regular updates.
- Ensure that your decision-makers are on board.
- Be open-minded to new ways of doing things - dare to push the envelope.

Link to Learning Organization Management...*Team Learning*

In this chapter we have paid attention to the role of the planning group. A planning group has the option of operating like an old fashioned committee or a more contemporary high-performance team. Committees tend to have lots of meetings and focus on action, getting the job done. Teams take the time to build a working relationship perhaps by doing a quick *Team Charter*. Then they use tools like the *Possibility Wall* to open up more conversation on possibilities. Then they move, based on this new learning together, into a more open field of action.

Any group of people that have to accomplish things together in a Learning Organization recognize that the need to learn together is as critical as the need to work together.

The Design

About this time, you need to start letting go...The groundwork of planning, expectations, roles and outcomes have been done. It is now up to the facilitator and the planning group to design how to reach the stated goals in a focused, quick and hopefully enjoyable way.

They will be looking at the session from a design perspective, thinking:

- Icebreakers, participant introductions and ground rules.
- Practices and tools well-suited for the objectives of the day.
- **Process of the day:** Look for and make sure there is time and sequence for the three major elements in good process that you learned from coaching. Start with the conversation for relationship, followed by the conversation for opening of possibilities and finally, the conversation for action. These pieces must build on one another.
- **Activity mix:** Check for a mix of large and small group activity. Make sure there is a balance between talking heads presentations, new learning material and dialogue. Is there recognition of different learning styles and personality types? How will decisions be made – By majority vote or by consensus?
- **Outcomes for the session:** Give strong directions as to *what* you expect to have accomplished at the end of the day. Be careful not to micro manage the *how* and *when*. Remember the more you know about facilitation, the better your questions.

SOME PITFALLS

TO AVOID...

- Being unclear as to what success will look like at the end of the day.
- Having too many objectives.
- The traditional approach to meetings...several presentations back to back does not allow for much intelligence gathering or networking.

SOME GOOD TOOLS AND PRACTICES...



- Spend time with the planning team, setting the context and debriefing the conversation with the facilitator.
- Stay connected to the purpose and to the people.
- Make clear requests.

Link to Learning Organization Management...*Systems Thinking*

As a Learning Organization manager, you are becoming aware of the importance of being a systems thinker. This means that you recognize the importance of looking at the big picture not just at what is bugging you today. You want to stop fixing problems and start fixing the system that created all these problems. The best part of fire fighting is the fire prevention. You want to break down the artificial barriers in your organization and work with all the necessary pieces of the system.

So it is with the importance of good design. Have you thought systematically? Is this effort only going to yield another band-aid or will this effort contribute to the well-being and improved effectiveness of the whole? Have we got the right people in the room? Are we going for root cause? Do we have the best intelligence and material? The *Systems Thinking* manager thinks well beyond that first look.

NOTES

The Contract

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Manager's Reference

As a manager you probably have a great deal of experience managing contracts. For the most part these contracts will be with people or companies outside your organization or the public service. These facilitators are on the inside of the public service. They do not require a contract for invoicing and payment, but we believe a contract is still invaluable for business concerns. We are not used to using contracts while dealing with people inside our system and we do not suggest that you use this approach from an onerous command and control perspective. Rather we see the contract as helping you manage this session from three main points; clarity, accountability and commitment.

This contract between you and the practitioner should simply be a record of your conversation. It would include such elements as logistics, product delivered, pre-work, post-work (evaluation etc), decision making and roles of all players.

Keep it simple, in plain language, but be thorough. As a manager, you don't need anyone saying down the line, "gee but I thought you...."

SOME PITFALLS

TO AVOID...

- Don't include too many details in the contract, nor should you take too much of a laissez-faire approach.

SOME GOOD TOOLS

AND PRACTICES...

- Create an internal contract template and bring a hard copy at your meeting to complete by hand. Photocopy it on the spot and leave a copy with your facilitator or, type it up when you go back to the office. Send a copy to your facilitator and keep one in your file.
- If you prefer a less formal approach, draft a quick e-mail summarizing the agreements you have made and copy the facilitator and the planning group members.
- Sometimes a simple verbal contract can be sufficient especially if you have had a long-term relationship with your facilitator and know what to expect.

The Set-up

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As manager of this session, you should have some sense of the physical set-up for the day. The room chosen can make or break the event. In Learning Organization management we are always aware of the need to create a “learning vessel” or a learning space. This includes both the physical and the emotional space. Make or break factors include: lighting, workable wall space, on-site or off-site, acoustics, technical support availability, food and set-up requirements by the facilitator.

Here again, resist micro managing. Your facilitator has a lot of experience with rooms that worked or did not work. Your support for their needs at this juncture is critical.

SOME PITFALLS TO AVOID...



- Insisting on a boardroom or theater set-up because that is what you are used to in your organization. You would be amazed at how much conversations can change when the boardroom table is replaced by several small round tables and even more so when you do away with tables altogether.
- As much as possible, stay away from the head table concept with podium and lectern (it gives a sense of formality that can be an impediment to meaningful conversations).

SOME GOOD TOOLS AND PRACTICES...



- If you are going to give a presentation, become familiar with the audiovisuals. Find out how to turn the microphone on and off, operate the overhead projector and the lap top computer, etc.
- We know things are tricky with the hospitality policies. But be aware that little gestures like providing coffee or treats (even if it is just Timbits™ or a pot luck kind of thing) go a long way to make people feel welcomed and valued.

*Your
Tool Box*

As a manager you have become more and more aware of the new tools and practices available for better communication, improved consultation, focused decision making and team effectiveness. The facilitator is carving out a new practice with these tools and you are about to reap the benefits of that practice. However, you need to know what tools they are using and how they fit into your strategic objectives. As you build your management skills in leading Learning Organizations, you have become more aware of the strategic and value added benefit of these techniques.

You know exactly what a *Workout* session is and how it plays out and what your role as a manager is in that process. You are starting to understand the key options available and how they differ between an *Open Space* session and a *Courtyard Café*.

These sorts of tools are the lifeblood of the facilitator, but more important they are the DNA of your workplace culture. As a manager you need to know what these tools are, where to get them and how they will help you harvest the inherent intelligence in your organization. You will then be well on your way to managing the knowledge as well as the programs in your organization.

SOME PITFALLS TO AVOID...

- Getting too comfortable with just one or two tools so that it is tempting to fall into the “one size fits all” phenomena.
- On the other end of the spectrum, sometimes you don’t need a fancy tool, you just need a good heart to heart dialogue.

SOME GOOD TOOLS AND PRACTICES...

- Stay abreast of the latest management/ leadership literature to learn new ways of thinking about the same old dilemmas and challenges.
- Take a big breath and offer to do some facilitation yourself to get a first hand experience of what good facilitation can do.

The Show

So it is now the day of the session...

As the manager/host, you may or may not be there. If you are not there, send flowers. Just kidding. Seriously, let them know in some way that you are paying attention. Wish them well. Let them know you are looking forward to hearing their results.

If you are there, pay attention. Try not to be one of those managers who shows up for his speech and then spends the rest of the day out in the hall on the cell phone. Participate fully yet try to remain very conscious of your impact on the group. There is always a question of how much management participates. It is an art to know how to participate in full dialogue without others feeling that you are pointing the way for them rather than discovering the way with them.

It takes practice, practice, practice.

SOME PITFALLS

TO AVOID...

- Being there in body but not in spirit...
- Acting as an observer rather than a full participant.
- Having pre-determined ideas about what you consider to be acceptable or unacceptable outcomes around content (if you are asking a group for input in a facilitated process then be committed to giving full consideration to the group's recommendations).

SOME GOOD TOOLS

AND PRACTICES...

- Model the behavior you want to see in the group (like Ghandi said: "Be the change you want to see in the world").
- Just for this day, try parking your Mental Models about job classifications and titles.
- Listen generously - there are so many gems that are yet to be discovered in your organization...

*The
Follow
Through*

You are back in the picture again. In fact, years of experience tell us that the number one reason people dislike meetings is the, all too often, lack of follow through.

First make sure that the logistical requirements were carried through. The materials generated were gathered, the recommendations clear and the evaluations complete. What was your agreement? Was this an information session, a listening session (consultation), a planning session or a decision making session? What did you agree to in the contract regarding follow through? Who will respond to the recommendations? What format will the response take?

Are you aware that it is usually easy to fulfill one third of all recommendations? Another third of the recommendations usually require more focused and deeper work. The final third are usually not really possible for financial, policy or legal reasons.

So, the ball is back in your court.

You have mined the intelligence, now it is back into your job as manager. There are many different implementation strategies. We tend to favour those strategies that give the implementation task back to the front line teams rather than creating special implementation teams, but it is your call.

What we do know is that this is not a time for filing in the “C” drawer!



SOME PITFALLS TO AVOID...

- Accepting more and more responsibilities without taking a moment to consider which responsibilities we can assign lower priorities to, and what we can stop doing.
- Delegating but not staying curious and interested in the progress made.
- Although we hear too often that the reason this plan/strategy did not work is because management did not make it work... the reality is that every single person on the team has a role to play and a contribution to make to the success of your initiative. As a good leader, it is your job to help new leaders emerge at all levels of the organization.

Taking Care

As a manager, you have a responsibility for the state of the workplace health in your area.

Just by reading this little book and involving a facilitator in your work says that you understand the value of bringing new Learning Organization management tools into your workplace.

You understand that we have to take care of two important things - ourselves and the work.

A. Taking care of you

As a manager, you are required to take on all kinds of responsibility. You have pressure from above, pressure from below, pressure from home and the worst pressure of all is from inside your own head.

Our best advice is just to start paying attention. Work-life balance is much more than lifestyle management workshop. It is a way of being in the workplace. If you want a highly productive, balanced work team with high morale, you will have to lead a highly productive balanced life yourself.

Some ways to increase this balance could include:

- **Feed your own learning.** Read books and articles, go to seminars and professional conferences. Take a night course.
- **Be a teacher.** When you teach not only do you build capacity in the workplace, but you challenge and feed your own thinking at the same time.
- **Feed your soul.** Write, paint, throw pots, design crafts, play music, climb mountains, curl up with your daughter or son or watch birds. Do something that feeds your spirit.

SOME PITFALLS

TO AVOID...

- Over extending...one good session trumps three mediocre ones.
- Taking on more than you know you can handle. Bite off chunks that bring quick success.
- Don't try to be a super hero. You have strengths, use them and then find someone else with other strengths to fill in the gaps.

- Don't be afraid to fail. Not all sessions go well. Let people make mistakes but be clear on the lessons learned from those mistakes.

SOME GOOD TOOLS AND PRACTICES...



- Join or form a learning team or a community of practice based on this new way of managing.
- Build your own personal toolkit. When you learn a technique, a story or a good practice, write it up and keep it in your own book of practice.
- Keep a *learning journal* where you write personal reflections on challenges you face, approaches that were successful, ways to tweak a process you like to make it even better or quotes that inspire you...

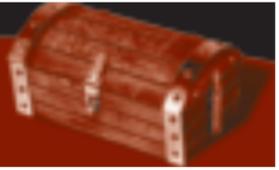
B. *Taking care of the organization*

Organizations tend to always be waiting. Waiting for the next management fad, waiting for the next manager, waiting for the new policy or waiting for a new government.

As a leader of a Learning Organization, you could in your own sphere of influence, help convince people that the wait is over. We know what we need to do...serve citizens better, manage public policy more effectively and change communities and the world for the better. We know how to do this...support our people, manage knowledge and create effective action through continuous learning and hot communication.

The nurture and support of facilitators in your organization is a critical component, not a frivolous add-on to a healthy workplace. Using facilitators will bring greater effectiveness and balance to your organization. The skills of these people will help you bring focus, manage time and work towards better decision making. This is perhaps how we really start to bring work life balance into our teams and organizations.

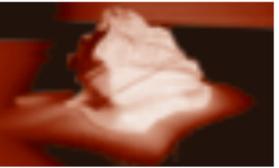
TO DO IT RIGHT...



- Build your own *personal mastery*. You need to align your personal vision and values to this type of management work. This is a lifetime project.
- Develop your own strategies for communication, marketing and learning.
- Join a community of practice. Help build organizational and external networks. The more relationships that get formed, the stronger the culture.

SOME PITFALLS

TO AVOID...



- Avoid the negativity. In the organization culture there are always pockets of nay sayers. Do not waste a lot of time and energy trying to convince them. Do good work, they will come around.
- Help your organization avoid the trap of the “prophet in his own country” syndrome. Too often organizations believe that expertise is better if they find it outside the organization. This is a huge hurdle that organizations must overcome if this internal facilitation work is to survive and thrive.

SOME GOOD TOOLS

AND PRACTICES...



- Build a *Team Charter* around the work with your peers.
- Get the work onto the management agenda.
- Get better by teaching and coaching.

CONCLUSION

See we told you it was just a start. Still we think it is a good start and we hope it will be helpful to you in your work as a manager or a facilitator/practitioner.

Promise us three things:

First, you are probably one of those people who never do anything by the book. Stick to that. Don't let a book do any more than keep your learning curve turned up.

Secondly, write in this book. You have tools, ideas and your own style. Get it in here. Good books get written all over.

And finally, join a community of practice on management or facilitation and use this book as a springboard for conversations to deepen your practice.

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National Managers' Community

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