



What Makes a Good Facilitator?

A facilitator is, “a person who is acceptable to all members of the group, substantively neutral and has no decision-making authority, intervenes to help a group improve the way it defines and solves problems in order to increase the group’s effectiveness.” - Roger Schwarz, *The Skilled Facilitator*

An excellent facilitator deeply understands the role, has invested in training, is expert in core methods, and constantly hones skills. Some people have natural talent for facilitation. All talented facilitators have invested in their skills.

What is an indicator of poor facilitation?

Weak Facilitation	Good Facilitation
<p>The facilitator had their own agenda. The group believed that <i>the facilitator had an agenda and was maneuvering the group towards an already determined outcome.</i></p>	<p>The facilitator must be <u>neutral</u>. The facilitator cannot have a pre-defined ‘answer.’ The facilitator may speculate on where the group will go for design purposes, but does not know ‘the answer.’ Otherwise, the facilitator is perceived to be in collusion with the organizer and the group will not support the result.</p>
<p>We didn’t get anything done. <i>Two days of gruelling meetings coming to a conclusion with no substantive result.</i></p>	<p>The facilitator guides the group to intended result. Facilitators are responsible for getting crystal clear on the desired outcome for the meeting. This means detailed discovery discussions with the client. Poor discovery leads to poorly defined outcomes and dissatisfied participants.</p>
<p>The facilitator talked too much. <i>The facilitator engaged with the discussion, shared opinions and took space away from participants.</i> Participants were frustrated by the inability of the facilitator to ‘stay out of it’.</p>	<p>The facilitator guides the discussion, they are not central to the conversation. Their role is to create the conditions for participation, to harness the wisdom of the group. They are not subject matter experts.</p>
<p>The process was convoluted. <i>The facilitator didn’t have a process that was clear or well understood or a ‘fit’ with the group.</i></p>	<p>A good facilitator designs process appropriate to a group. Good process is based on an understanding of group dynamics and how people think. The most involved part of event preparation is planning the appropriate group process.</p>
<p>The facilitator was winging it. <i>The facilitator seemed to be adjusting their plan on the fly and didn’t really seem to know where they were headed.</i></p>	<p>A good facilitator has detailed process design. They can tell you what and why they are doing what they are doing. It is not to say that a facilitator never changes plans mid-event, because that does happen. When course change is needed, a good facilitator discusses the situation with the group and makes change with the input and the consent of the group.</p>

What Are Relevant Credentials?

If you’re hiring a facilitator for the first time, look for the following:

- Professional certification (through [IAF](#), [INIFAC](#) or other)
- Adhere to professional ethics (see [IAF’s code of ethics](#))
- Formal training ([Technology of Participation](#), [The Art of Hosting](#), [The Skilled Facilitator](#), [Leadership Strategies](#))
- Engage in continuous professional development