

Effective Meeting Facilitation

On Thursday, March 29, 2007, I was a guest facilitator for a University of Washington course offered by the [Technical Communications](#) department. The course was *TC 403: Project Management*, taught by Karen Kasonic.

Our topic was **effective meetings**. The class of approximately 30 students identified (1) what leader behaviors help to create effective meetings, and (2) characteristics of the meeting itself that help accomplish meaningful work done. This document is a reflection of their work.

My goal as facilitator was to both show and tell—in other words, to "walk the talk" of effective meeting facilitation by providing a learning experience that mirrored the themes we discussed. I disclosed my goal before we began, and students provided feedback on areas they thought I had succeeded as well as areas they thought I could improve.

Characteristics of an Effective Leader

- tone of voice, projection
- style
- confidence
- positional power, hierarchy
- credentials
- preparedness, organization
- initiative
- professionalism
- costuming (appropriate attire)
- room structure
- engaging
- decisive movement
- context
- meeting structure
- eye contact
- delegation

Characteristics of an Effective Meeting

- meeting structure
 - agenda of tasks
 - begin and end on time
- room structure
 - be able to see everyone
- audience diversity
 - different experiences/opinions
 - several points of view
- action items
 - roles and goals
- preparedness
- positive attitude/enthusiasm
- food incentive
- room setting
 - comfortable conditions
 - good work space
- accomplishment
- purpose and content
 - mutual understanding of meeting goals
 - necessity of meeting face to face
- mutual respect
 - listening to one another
- stay focused on agenda items/schedule
- setting ground rules
 - decorum
 - arrive on-time
 - turn off cell phones
- start on time, but don't start with important stuff
 - tardy people will still receive crucial information
 - start with "soft" content
- engagement
 - audience participation/interaction
- make sure the right people are in the room
 - decision makers

In addition to the themes the students identified, I supplied a one-page handout that covered three additional themes: adult learning, group development, and group process. The handout is on the next page.

I am grateful to the class for their enthusiastic participation and for their candid feedback.

Additional Resources

These three themes, adult learning, group development, and group process, provide meeting facilitators with additional frames of reference. The themes address empowerment and participation, appropriate level of direction and structure, and appropriate balance between task and group maintenance.

Adult Learning Theory

Key concepts of *andragogy* (as opposed to pedagogy), by Knowles, Elwood, and Swanson's (1998):

- Make explicit the learner's need to know new information
- Self-direction
- Acknowledge and use adult experiences
- Readiness to learn
- Task-based or problem-centered orientation to learning
- Intrinsic motivation

LESSONS FOR FACILITATORS: Adult learning theory assumes competence, relevance, autonomy, and choice—powerful assumptions to make in meetings.

Source: Knowles, Malcolm S., Elwood, H. F., & Swanson, R. A. (1998). *The Adult Learner* (5th ed.). Woburn, MA: Butterworth-Heinemann. pp. 64-68.

Online: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andragogy>

Group Development

Bruce Tuckman put forward a model of group development that included several stages:

- Forming
- Storming
- Norming
- Performing
- Adjourning

LESSONS FOR FACILITATORS: Each stage requires different levels of direction and structure—usually more direction in the earlier stages and less as the group comes together and moves toward functioning as a team.

Source: Tuckman, Bruce. (1965). Developmental sequence in small groups. *Psychological bulletin*, 63, 384-399.

Online: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forming-storming-norming-performing>

Group Process

Some elements of group process:

- Patterns of communication and coordination
- Patterns of influence
- Patterns of dominance (e.g., who leads, who defers)
- Balance of task focus vs maintenance
- Level of group effectiveness
- How conflict is handled

LESSONS FOR FACILITATORS: Pay attention to the group processes. When appropriate, name the pattern and let the group sort out the meaning. Increase the group's tolerance to effectively manage conflict.

Online: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Group_process