

What do we mean by ‘facilitating development’?¹

Helping people discover what is truly important to them

The role of the facilitator working in development is to help individuals, organisations and communities identify issues that are important to them, decide on solutions and plan a course for action. In fulfilling this role, the facilitator draws on a variety of participatory approaches of co-learning among facilitators and communities, where the facilitator too must critically examine her/his own attitudes and beliefs. This process of co-learning allows development practitioners and community members to discover new ways of working together and to create new possibilities for the future.

Three beliefs underpin this understanding of facilitation: first, facilitation processes that are issues-based and firmly embedded in community issues and concerns promote reflective practice. Second, critical reflection is pre-requisite for action-oriented learning. Third, group tasks and report-back sessions allow participants to talk back and oblige others to listen.

The facilitator role is to negotiate a process that will help participants draw out their opinions and ensure they participate effectively with each other.

- S/he is neutral with respect to the solutions of the issues being brought before the group.
- S/he is *objective regarding the meaning of the different issues* and resources relating to the problem.
- S/he is *committed ethically to collaboration and participatory decision making*.

In summary, facilitation is about making learning possible. The aim of facilitation is to create the conditions – through various processes and tasks – to optimise individual and group learning. Whatever approaches are employed to structure learning, it is vital that these are clearly articulated and consistent with a set of core values.

Key responsibilities and core values

A central function of a facilitator is to focus on *how well* people work together. S/he must also *trust* that each member of the group can and will share responsibility for what happens. To do this, s/he needs to both trust the group and to be trusted by the group.

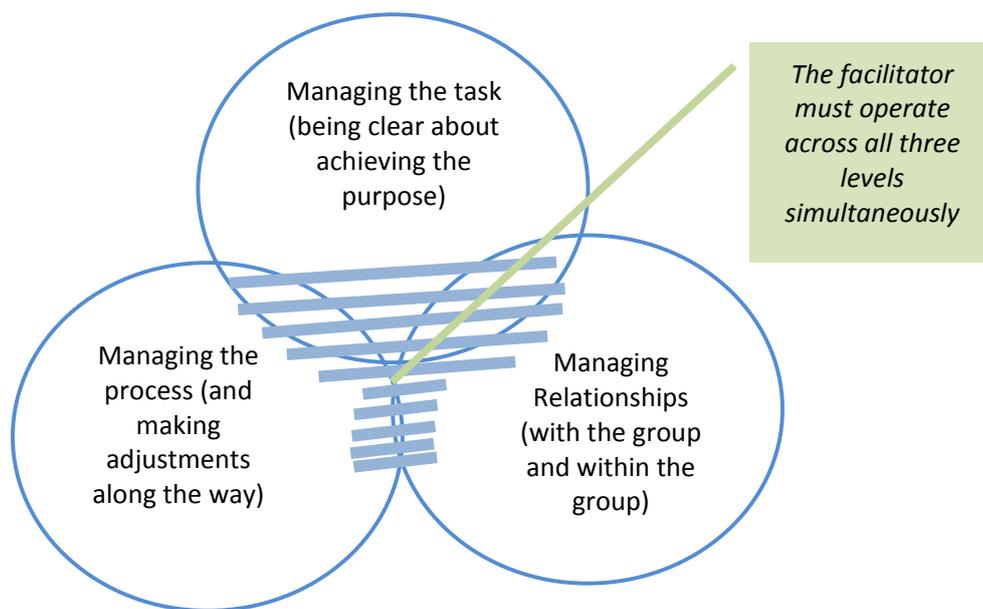
In order to fulfil this role, s/he must manage several key responsibilities, including:

- a. Laying out clear goals (purpose)
- b. Identifying a process to achieve the purpose and clearly communicating where and how the process addresses these goals;
- c. Establishing norms and modelling behaviour;
- d. Assisting in the flow of information and ensuring full and equal participation;
- e. Creating the safe space that allows participants to ‘speak out’

¹ Summary of a white paper on facilitation written by Graeme Storer for VBNK

- f. Practising powerful listening (her own and within the group);
- g. Understanding the needs of the group (and balancing individual needs with the group task);
- h. Drawing out the opinions and issues that are important to the group members *and* helping the group synthesise and prioritise;
- i. Encouraging shared responsibility (ownership for what happens), leadership and facilitation.

In conclusion, the *art of facilitation* is to simultaneously balance task, process and relationship.



- Task facilitation focuses on the outcome(s) and on doing the necessary steps to complete the task(s). At this level, the role of the facilitator is to assist the group to successfully complete the task.
- Process facilitation is about designing and managing the actual process in order to achieve the task. The role of the facilitator is to assist the group to work together and develop as a group. The successful outcome is an effective self-managing group. The facilitator also identifies particular approaches to help the group achieve their objectives and to overcome 'stuckness.'
- Relationship facilitation is about first, managing the relationship with the group (i.e. establishing trust between the facilitator and the participants) and second, between the participants. It is here that the facilitator encourages the group's inner work, the process of reflection, and learning. The role of the facilitator is to assist the group in learning to learn collaboratively and individually. It may also require working with conflict within the group.