

Four Types of Group Facilitation Skills:

Being an effective group leader in Fatherhood/Motherhood is Sacred you must have skills that allow you to influence the way a group interacts and learns. These skills are collectively referred to as “Group Facilitation Skills”. In order to develop these skills it will help if you are able to identify, learn, and practice a wide variety of specific behaviors that promote positive group interactions. This page will describe four types of facilitation skills that promote different types of learning. The model represented here assumes that an effective group leader has facilitation skills appropriate for promoting different types of interactive learning.

Engaging Facilitation Skills - Invites members to be part of a group and encourages a member to feel included and valued within the group context. It will help individuals make the transition from their past experiences into a new context and helps group members reflect on what they already know and prepare them for interactive learning. Engaging skills are used to create curiosity, interest and energy and encourage the discovery of personal meaning and interpersonal connections.

Informing Facilitation Skills- Provides the group with information from outside the group and helps the group learn about itself. These skills include teaching factual information and allowing group members to gain new knowledge. Two types of information are relevant to a group learning format; first, content information from outside the group and, second, process information from within the group itself.

Involving Facilitation Skills - Encourages positive interaction and learning between group members. These skills create an opportunity for active experimentation and encourage learning by practice and allow group members to put new knowledge to practical use. Because involvement occurs when group members themselves practice and gain hands-on experience, these facilitation skills require a shift in focus away from the leader and toward the group and its members.

Planning Facilitation Skills - Focus's on planning for the future and applying learning from the group to other situations. These skills encourage members to work together to make specific plans to accomplish group or individual goals. Planning skills prepare group members to move from active experimentation within the group to concrete experience beyond the group.

20 Group Facilitation Skills

Engaging Facilitation Skills

- Demonstrating Leadership – letting the group know who's in charge.
- Creating an Open Environment – inviting people to be a part of the group.
- Encouraging Connections – helping people get acquainted and connected.
- Building Group Rapport – facilitating a sense of teamwork and unity.
- Defining Group Identity – establishing the group purpose and personality.

Informing Facilitation Skills

- Providing Information – presenting facts, resources, knowledge, theories, or data.
- Soliciting Information – asking questions, surveying ideas, or gathering data.
- Clarifying Ideas of Concepts – making sure everyone is on the same wavelength.
- Conceptualizing – using new knowledge to better understand the group.
- Learning from Within the Group – gathering information about the group itself.

Involving Facilitation Skills

- Inviting Participation and Interaction – prompting action, contact, and dialogue.
- Counting Back to the Group – shifting focus away from the leader.
- Recognizing Commonalities & Promoting Consensus – finding common ground.
- Supporting Cooperation & Group Cohesion – fostering group unity.
- Experimenting with New Behavior – encouraging members to try new things.

Planning Facilitation Skills

- Brainstorming – identifying multiple possibilities.
- Generalizing – taking experience from one area and trying it in another.
- Strategizing – determining the best way to approach an issue.
- Applying – putting knowledge into action or taking learning with you.
- Making Specific Plans – creating an action plan.

Examples of Engaging Facilitation Skills

Demonstrating Leadership - This skill identifies you as the leader and lets group members know that you'll provide guidance, support, and structure for the group. Example: I always go over the ground rules of our Fatherhood/Motherhood group. Also make any announcements you may have. Be CONSISTENT, make it a habit to be yourself, be sincere and show kindness and support to the fathers and mothers.

Creating an Open Environment - There are things you can do as a leader to welcome new members to the group and make them feel included. Example: I tell the fathers/mothers that when they "walked" through that door and made the "CHOICE" to join us in class that it really and sincerely makes me feel good. I tell them that I am proud of them for their mere presence. I usually walk over and shake their hand, and sometimes we give a hug.

Encouraging Connections - In order to feel connected to a group, members need to get to know one another and see what they have in common. Example: We tell the fathers/mothers that once they walk through that door, they are a father/mother! We make it clear that we are all the same, not better than another. I tell them that in addition to facilitating and teaching the class, I am also a father/mother! We belong to each other and we need one another. It always makes them feel comfortable and at ease and you will be able to see it and sense it.

Building Group Rapport - One of the challenges of group leadership is creating camaraderie and good will within the group. It is important to encourage positive interactions that make members feel good about being part of the group. Example: For me I always use humor and laughter. It fits my personality and it makes the fathers/mothers fears go out the window if they had any to begin with, and I am sure they do. Teasing one another in a positive way always brings us closer as fathers/mothers.

Defining Group Identity - Every group has an identity and an atmosphere. As a leader, you will set the tone for defining what the group is all about and what it feels like to be a member. Example: Our fathers/mothers can feel the "spirit" there with us when we have class! It has amazed me how easy the tears come out when we are in class. It is so touching and beautiful as the fathers/mothers shed tears and heal at the same time. As Al Pooley taught me, we always open with a prayer, but for us when we close with a prayer we are all holding hands in a circle, and we then break and shake hands and hug around. Time after time the fathers/mothers tell me they feel special, they feel wanted and they feel RESPECTED!

Examples of Informing Facilitation Skills

Providing Information - Leadership often involves providing the group with pertinent information that they don't already have. This information might include facts, resources, knowledge, theories, or data. A lecture is one of many ways to provide information. Example: We go over community events and as one of the 5 main principles is SERVICE, we have discussions on how we have served our families during the week and or others. In that discussion any and all information concerning our fathers/mothers is usually presented by more than one father/mother.

Soliciting Information - A leader often needs to collect information from the group members. This can be done by asking open-ended questions, surveying ideas, or gathering data. Example: This usually comes out in providing information, but if we get more specific we go around the circle and all the fathers/mothers express themselves and information and more come out through stories the fathers/mothers tell.

Clarifying Ideas or Concepts - This skill involves making sure everyone understands what is being said or agreed upon. One way to clarify is to summarize the concept or idea and see if there are any misunderstandings. Example: With this we usually re-read the statement that we are discussing and have the fathers/mothers express themselves to see if they understood and how they feel about the "issue" at hand.

Conceptualizing - Being a leader sometimes involves using new or outside knowledge to help the group better understand itself. Looking at the group using a particular theory, model, or concept is one example of conceptualizing. An example is "parenting" or how one gives out discipline in the home. We talk about different examples based on different cultures or tribes. Then we go around the circle and the fathers/mothers begin to understand that they don't have to agree with a new or different way of being a father/mother, but they offer stories on how "they" themselves were disciplined as children. Then they understand.

Learning from Within the Group - In addition to providing information from outside the group, you can survey group members or gather information about the group itself. You might also use your observation skills to identify group characteristics, themes, or processes. Example same as above! There are so many individual strengths within the group and it comes out of the fathers/mothers when they express themselves!

Examples of Involving Facilitation Skills

Inviting Participation and Interaction - Leadership often involves prompting group members to take action or to interact with one another. This interaction can occur within the present group or in the future. Example: The fathers/mothers feel comfortable and with our class we go way over the two hour time period that is recommended, and that's because of the fathers participating and interacting with one another.

Bouncing Back to the Group - The group's attention may naturally gravitate toward you as the leader. However, it is often helpful for you to deflect this attention and "bounce" the focus or energy back to the group itself to keep interaction and involvement high. Example: Again, we go around the circle and the fathers/mothers express themselves on the discussion at hand. As the leader or facilitator of the class, you must include and encourage them to express themselves. One thing that is important to remember is to NEVER cut any of the fathers/mothers off when speaking. It might take 20 minutes through a story to get their point across.

Recognizing Commonalities and Promoting Consensus - Promoting involvement often involves helping group members find similarities in ideas, interests, values, and plans. Conflicts often arise when the group focuses on differences rather than common ground. Identifying similarities can be used to support common goals. Example: Any issues that we discuss that are sensitive, we give the fathers/mothers time to state how they feel about an issue. We strive to promote consensus but at some point you have to come to agree that you cannot agree on an issue and learn from the comments and stories that were shared. It takes time for fathers/mothers to comprehend and go through their individual thought process.

Supporting Cooperation and Group Cohesion - As the identity of the group continues to form and strengthen, a key leadership skill is to encourage supportive interactions and nurture the ongoing interdependence of the member so that they feel like they can accomplish more as a group than individually. Example: We do this by having the fathers/mothers discuss what activity they wish to do for the community and their families. They take the ownership upon themselves and they are on unified units of fathers/mothers! It is very beautiful to see the changes in the fathers/mothers throughout the classes; they get better and better each week!

Experimenting with New Behavior - Group learning often involves encouraging members to try new things. Experimenting can include role plays, work sheets, or other exercises as well as simply suggesting alternate behaviors for members to try.

Examples of Planning Facilitation Skills

Brainstorming - One of the best ways for a group to start the planning process is by generating lots of ideas in a non-evaluative manner. Brainstorming allows a group to think of a diverse and large number of ideas in a short period of time without rejecting ideas too quickly. Example: The fathers/mothers are great at this, again through the fathers/mothers expressing themselves and during their speaking; you can already see that the other fathers/mothers are in agreement.

Generalizing - This skill involves taking a successful behavior from one area and trying it in a new area. Example: Same as with Brainstorming.

Strategizing - After analyzing a problem and brainstorming possible solutions, it is important to make a decision about the best way to solve a problem or approach a challenge. Example: We have the fathers/mothers go through the process of steps, step one we will do this and that and so on, and then assign who is responsible.

Applying - Once knowledge has been shared in a group, it should be put into action in a way that directly relates to the experience of the group. In this way, group member can take new learning home with them. Example: The “applying” with our fathers/mothers is again through the stories they share and how they feel about a subject. And by the time we have fine around the circle we have heard of different ways of applying what we have discussed.

Making Specific Plans - Creating an action plan with specific steps, a time-line, and designation of who is going to take the lead on each section, is a crucial skill in helping a group realize its goals. Example: We put somebody in charge of cooking, sending out invitations, contacting the Casino, making sure we reserve the gym and so on. (With our big graduations we usually leave that up to the woman!! NO just teasing)

Leadership Techniques that Support Group Facilitation

Checking-in / Round Robin - To ensure complete participation, it may be helpful to go around the group and have each member take a turn sharing. (Supports all four facilitation skills)

Writing - Writing can be used as a way for member to privately organize their thoughts before sharing with the larger group. One way to do this is by handing out index cards and having members record their thoughts. (Supports all four facilitation skills)

Using Humor - To build group rapport, you may want to use some moderate and appropriate humor. Positive humor should be used to create safety and not alienate or offend the people in the group. (Engaging)

Self-Disclosing - At times, it is appropriate to share you own experiences as an example or model. Self disclosure can also be used to build rapport with the group by highlighting your similarity to group members. (Engaging / Informing)

Surveying / Voting - One way to gather information about a group is to survey all the members or to have them vote on a particular issue or idea. (Informing)

Modeling - Demonstrating skills and/or behavior is an active way of providing information to a group that prepares them for practice or other forms of involvement. (Informing / Involving)

Sharing in Pairs / Small Groups - Breaking the group into pairs or small groups allows all members to share their ideas in a less-threatening environment. After sharing in a small group, some members may find it more comfortable to share their ideas with the large group. Common themes can then be identified in an open discussion. (Involving)

Critiquing / Giving Feedback - One to involve group members is to ask them to give feedback or to critique what you or others have said or done. It is important to encourage the group to start with strengths or positive feedback before suggesting areas of improvement. (Involving)

Role Playing - A great way to encourage new behavior is to ask group member to actually act out what they would do or say in particular situation. Other group members can play other roles to flesh out the situation. (Involving / Planning)

Strategies for Improving Your Facilitation Skills

Identify Your Own Learning Style - Complete Kolb's Learning Style Inventory to assess your learning preferences. Your leadership style may emphasize your preferences and overlook the needs of other styles.

Consider the Diversity of Learning Styles in Your Group - Remember that people in your group probably have a range of learning styles. This will help you adapt various approaches to facilitation that meet diverse learning needs.

Reflect on Your Strengths and Weaknesses - Review the list of 20 facilitation skills and make note of those that you consider personal strengths and those that need the most improvement.

Target Specific Skills for Practice - Look over the skills you have identified for improvement or addition and decide which skills you should work on first. It is best to target no more than two or three at a time.

Practice Skills in a Safe Environment - Identify a safe place, such as a leadership class, where it is okay to make mistakes and experiment with new techniques. This is the ideal way to start practicing new skills.

Identify Opportunities in Your Group to Improve or Try New Skills - Seek out diverse opportunities to practice facilitation in your group. Volunteer to facilitate a portion of your next meeting or give a presentation. Look for opportunities to practice facilitation skills in informal interaction with group members as well.

Ask Someone to Observe and Give You Feedback - Ask another leader to observe your facilitation skills and give you constructive feedback on what you did well and what you can improve.

Observe Other Leaders - Watch other leaders facilitate a group to discover ways to enhance your own skills. Use the Group Facilitation Skills Checklist to keep track of the skills you observe.

Videotape Yourself and Evaluate Your Skill Usage - Observe yourself in videotape to assess and improve your leadership.

Engaging Facilitation Skills Worksheet

For each of the following skills, please think about your roles as a group leader and write down an example of something you could say or do that demonstrates this skill.

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