3.2.2 Profile of a Quality Facilitator

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Quality facilitators improve their performance through behaviors that can be classified and quantified. By encoding these behaviors into a profile, by integrating them into a facilitation rubric, and by regularly assessing facilitation using these tools, participants and facilitators can develop a shared vision of facilitator performance criteria for many different contexts. In formulating these criteria, special attention was given to classroom teaching, committee meetings, and faculty development workshops.

Need for a Facilitator Profile

Many facilitators have little or no training for this important work. Often the facilitation they have experienced during both their educational and professional careers has been mediocre. Lacking good models, it is difficult for them to become quality facilitators. This module, together with others in this chapter, attempts to remedy this situation. Research and experience have shown that in order to improve performance, it is essential to have clear criteria against which to measure it. Without these criteria, facilitators have no way to assess their progress (*4.1.1 Overview of Assessment*). An effective way to identify performance criteria is to list the behaviors one would expect to find in a quality performer. This collection of behaviors organized by activity components is known as a "profile."

Organization of the Profile

Six key facilitation areas were used to construct a profile for a quality facilitator (*3.2.3 Facilitation Methodology*). These areas are preparation, needs assessment, setup, facilitating experience, closure, and follow-through. The profile was developed by isolating a few behaviors possessed by a quality facilitator in each area (Table 1). To determine the most important behaviors in each area, it was necessary to review the essential elements of facilitation (*3.2.1 Overview of Facilitation*), the research on process educators over the last ten years, and the experience of observing quality facilitators in action. The profile provides a goal for facilitators to strive to attain, and a snapshot of performance at the highest level, but the rubric described in the next section (Table 2) should be of greater help during their gradual improvement process.

Facilitation Rubric

Once the performance criteria have been encapsulated in the profile, it is important to prepare a tool to measure where a facilitator is currently positioned along the continuum leading to the goal identified by the profile. The rubric outlined in Table 2 provides a basis for ranking a facilitation performance based on its quality (*1.5.5 Identifying Performance Measures for a Program*). A

rubric classifies different levels of performance, giving the participant behaviors commonly found at each level (*1.4.2 Fundamentals of Rubrics*). The five levels of facilitator performance are ranger, manager, director, coach, and change agent. A ranger does little preparation when pursuing the goal and attempts to meet crises as they arise. A manager prepares carefully to present information needed to attain the goal to the participants, but does little to assess whether or not the information is being well utilized. A director engages others to achieve the goal by setting up a sequence of milestones and making sure the participants meet these milestones. The focus is not on individual or team growth, but bringing the project to a successful conclusion through active participation. A coach focuses on the growth of each participant as the goal is attained, while a change agent (quality facilitator) melds the individuals into effective teams, changing the system on the way to the goal, and making sure that team members become interdependent (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1991) and individually accountable for team success.

To use the rubric, a facilitator looks at the paragraph attached to each level and tries to find the set of behaviors that best define his or her approach. Even though facilitators will possess some of the qualities from higher levels, they should place themselves at the level whose description best describes their strengths. With the help of a mentor, facilitators should identify the specific steps needed to achieve the next level, modifying their behavior so that it conforms to the higher levels of the rubric as quickly as possible. Each level has behaviors pertaining to the six areas from the profile of a quality facilitator.

A professional growth plan provides a step-by-step model for improvement. There are several tools developed to help faculty members identify their goals when constructing professional growth plans. One of the most helpful is the "Teaching Goals Inventory and Self-Scoreable Worksheet" (Angelo & Cross, 1993). It is also important to engage in regular self-assessment to ensure continued performance at each level; no backtracking. For example, many facilitators possess all the director qualities, but will allow teams to "remain at task beyond peak performance."

Table 1   ***Profile of a Quality Facilitator***

Preparing	• Develops resources for multiple scripts/tasks • Designs strong structures through a facilitation plan, a road map • Predicts the major issues that must be addressed including what "done" looks like • Prepares background conceptual knowledge • Defines metrics for project success, such as cost, schedule, performance, or quality
Assessing audience needs	• Affirms what each brings to the table • Discovers major issues people are confronting • Seeks out the outcomes for each person • Identifies collective outcomes • Clearly predicts and verifies everyone's role in moving along the road map
Setup	• Clarifies expectations • Creates a framework for the process; describes the road map and major milestones • Establishes teams • Motivates individuals for the experience • Performs risk assessment and predefines risk management
Facilitating experience	• Constantly transfers ownership to participants • Actively assesses progress of individuals and teams • Constructively intervenes on process issues, not content • Continuously raises the bar to challenge participants • Monitors objective metrics and actively acts on data to ensure success
Closure	• Stops activity at the top of the production curve • Requests each team representative to summarize issues, good and bad • Does a perception check for consensus within each team • Makes sure that each issue has an owner and due date to ensure resolution • Insists on assessment of learning processes
Follow-up	• Makes sure team members achieve individual/collective outcomes • Accepts constructive criticism and promises action toward improvement • Ensures that all data is collected for participant reflection • Reinforces negative and positive issues as equally important • Clarifies the next step in the process

Table 2   **Facilitation Rubric**

Change Agent: promotes team growth and mentors other facilitators

Researches the audience, prepares a varied set of resources, scouts the environment, identifies issues and challenges, and prepares personally to give all of self during the event. Quickly assesses the collective and individual needs of the participants in the form of outcomes and creates the learning or growth environment that has characteristics such as risk-taking, mutual respect, challenge, and support. Provides constructive interventions on group process. Constantly challenges performance. Monitors the project in real time and knows its day-to-day pulse by comparing each individual's performance to established metrics. Has the ability to embed assessment in a variety of activities, both formal and informal. Always assesses his or her facilitation plan after each event to improve performance.

Coach: empowers participants and promotes individual growth

Designs activities that promote growth. Is adept at adapting the facilitation plan to meet individual needs. Establishes a learning situation in which participants succeed, rather than fail. Communicates clear performance criteria. Is aware of individual strengths and areas for improvement. Encourages participants with positive messages, verbal and written. Delegates issues and ensures that team members commit and deliver. Allows participants freedom to make decisions and knows the project's pulse through MBWA (management by walking around) concepts and practices (Peters & Waterman, 1982). Provides direct support to those who need assistance. Helps participants question ideas and concepts. Can assess individual performance in real time. Helps team members identify and mitigate risks. Cares for and respects the learner. Has the ability to grow the assessment skills of participants. Encourages documentation of learning at the close of each event. Interacts with participants between events.

Director: engenders success, organizing sequences of activities to meet an objective

Uses multiple facilitation techniques in varied situations. Works to obtain participant commitment and buy-in to the project. Makes sure people understand the goals. Keeps teams conscious of time and on task. Allocates time for new learning when there is clear and immediate payback. Has strong affective skills and is able to handle frustration. Follows continuous quality improvement principles. Guides projects to successful conclusion. Works with participants between events to produce documentation to illustrate product quality.

Manager: effectively manages time, following own agenda over participant needs

Has mastery of the supporting tools of the content. Has strong self-confidence. Is organized and prepared content-wise for the facilitation. Provides a clear outline. Uses models effectively. Resists wasting time using assessment processes, and relies on evaluation to provide motivation. Maintains focus during the activity. Sticks to the facilitation plan without regard for affective issues. Reviews content at the end of the activity. Holds participants accountable for the content covered. Believes the statement, "If I said it clearly and they answer correctly, then they must have understood it" (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

Ranger: avoids planning for goals of any type, reacting to problems when they occur

Always remains at the center and in control of the learning process. Does not share the performance criteria (if any) with the participants. Allows teams to be nonproductive and remain at task beyond the peak of their performance. Intervenes only to avert disaster and blames participants for poor performance. Seldom brings closure to an activity, leaving participants frustrated. Has no time for follow-up with participants between events.

SECTION 3

Efficacy of the Profile in Different Faculty Facilitator Contexts

Faculty are expected to be able to facilitate in a number of different contexts. The most common are classroom teaching, committee meeting, and faculty development activities. It is helpful to think about how to use the profile and its accompanying rubric to improve the quality of facilitation in each of these contexts.

Since the facilitation of student learning is the most important responsibility of a faculty member (Millis & Cottrell, 1998), it is important to examine the application of the profile to classroom teaching. The organization of the profile follows closely the essential steps in the facilitation of a classroom activity. The behaviors in the profile, if carefully followed, will ensure that faculty will help students enhance their learning before, during, and after the activity.

A faculty member also has certain service responsibilities that almost always include committee work. When given an opportunity to facilitate a committee meeting, he or she can build a good reputation as an effective leader by following the profile. Careful perusal of the profile confirms that its organization is just as appropriate for a committee meeting as for a classroom activity. Some of the behaviors need to be interpreted differently in this new context, however. The behaviors in the preparation, needs assessment, and follow-up sections are the same. The setup section recommends establishing teams. The committee as a whole could be one team, or, as the meeting progresses, the facilitator may break off subcommittees or teams to be responsible for parts of the work. If the facilitator feels comfortable with assigning roles to the committee members, the active use of a reflector can alleviate the need for the facilitator to directly challenge participants or to intervene on process issues in both the facilitating experience and closure sections. In the context of a committee meeting, the facilitator senses when enough discussion has occurred so that the committee can act on the issue; he or she "cuts off activity at the top of production curve."

Finally, faculty often engage in professional development alone and in departmental or larger groups. At times, they will be called upon to facilitate these activities. At other times, they will be asked for feedback on the facilitation. In both cases, the profile is helpful, and the behaviors outlined therein are all pertinent, although it is much more challenging to facilitate activities that involve faculty than to facilitate those involving students. Faculty are more likely than students to resist behavioral change, so it is recommended that faculty strive to become quality facilitators of student activities before attempting the leadership of professional development processes.

Concluding Thoughts

The profile of a quality facilitator provides a tool for assessing facilitation skills and also a goal for improving them. Using this profile and its accompanying rubric productively will be a challenge, however. An inexperienced facilitator should find a mentor who is willing to serve as a peer coach and provide assessment feedback. Such a mentor can also help the faculty member develop and follow his or her professional development plan. A mentor should pick three to five key metrics for each level and help the facilitator move quickly through the lower three levels. Eighty percent of the mentoring effort should focus on the coach and change agent levels. Also, a research effort is needed to clearly specify what it means to achieve each level and to address the concepts of delegation, multitasking, and risk management in the rubric. Finally, every facilitator, no matter how skilled, will benefit from using the profile and rubric to measure his or her skills.

References

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