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Caption

Facilitation is a key concept in moving from the old to the new paradigm. It marks the shift from a domination-driven approach to leadership to one where a range of styles that honour participation, co-operation and necessary hierarchy, as in the emergency services.

A facilitator is anyone who instructs, initiates, confronts, guides and supports within the context of a work or training group, or in one-to-one counselling or therapy. At the moment, facilitation is found in some businesses, non-governmental organizations, religious orders and professional training; but this model of leadership can be applied to any situation at work or at home where the appetite for authoritarian control is fading.

While facilitation is a well established tradition, many businesses avoid the risks (and benefits) that wider diffusion of facilitation skills would bring, and see facilitation as a niche specialty, or they buy it in as consultancy. This is a pity because trapping facilitative skills in a bubble restricts their capacity to enhance cooperation, participation and a sense of ownership.

[more](#)

Becoming a facilitator

An effective facilitator is someone who has made significant progress down the road to the new paradigm that *The Mind Gymnasium* outlines—they have a sharpened awareness of process, ‘how we do ourselves’—are open to the negotiation of, and have clarity about, power issues—they have a good understanding of how groups, teams and organizations function—and have made significant progress in resolving their own history of personal distress, so that in working with other people they neither impose it, nor feel inhibited by it.

Personal and professional development often has the quality of a journey, even a pilgrimage, a form of travelling where you are beneficially at risk of discovering, confronting, and embracing aspects of yourself that had become hidden. The outcome may not be very dramatic, I often describe it as *settling into ourselves*, belonging, at last, to ourselves, becoming a ‘person in our own right’. Whichever version of this journey you find appetizing, or liveable, in my opinion it forms the only secure foundation for a facilitative approach to helping, healing, educating i.e. the provision of services where both facilitator and clients are emotionally at risk. Good facilitation also involves acknowledging, where appropriate, how incomplete our own journeys are, and being honest in our relations with others about intrusions from our own personal history, if and when they occur.

A good way of defining these foundations for good facilitation is **emotional competence**, which provides a sound basis on which to build the skills and knowledge that I outline on the following screens.

[more](#)

Developing as a facilitator

Developing as a facilitator means learning to initiate a wide range of activities, from mediation, negotiation, leading problem-solving and crisis management—to bodywork, arousing and quietening physical energy—to emotional work, involving catharsis, emotional release—and leading the gathering and integration what is being discovered. For facilitators working with groups and teams, it also includes continuously assessing and planning timing, events and resources, as well as intuitively anticipating the changing needs of the group. In addition, a good facilitator needs to be able to communicate skilfully in a wide variety of ways.

For the reasons outlined on the previous screen, facilitators can only reliably take other people to a depth of exploration that they themselves have personally experienced. But anyone in the foothills of their personal journey can still do useful work with other people provided they take care to stay in their undistressed areas. To be able to do this—to know where we fly and where we are likely to flounder—requires an adequately accurate form of assessment of capability. As you'd expect in a new paradigm form of development, facilitator accountability and competence is most reliably based on **self and peer assessment**—an alternative to authoritarian qualification processes.

[more](#)

Where to use facilitation

When it's a strain to finish what we are doing, or when work is emotionally challenging and all around us are losing their heads, the *how* of getting a job done and making decisions tends to drop out of sight and yet this often defines the quality, effectiveness, or accuracy of the completed task. Facilitation is based on being acutely aware of *process*, on being able to keep the *how* of what we do in sight, especially when time is running out, or crisis threatens. Facilitation can be used anywhere but particularly where customer contact, creativity, productivity and quality are important, including manufacturing, public services, small businesses and partnerships, and families.

[more](#)

Paying attention to *process* means distinguishing between the conscious aspects of a task—conducting an interview, or leading a meeting, or writing a report, for example the details of time and the order of the agenda—and the out of awareness emotional, feeling, or imaginative aspects of the event. *How* it is being done in addition to *what* is being done.

Being aware of process means that body language, tone of voice, silences, posture, quality of attention, fatigue, attendance/non-attendance, or lateness become considerations in how a task is pursued. Examples might include: assessing the 'feeling of the meeting', acting to relax interpersonal tensions, or calling a break when attention is drifting.

When to use which facilitation style

The following series of screens outline a set of facilitation styles that have evolved out of research and training in several organizations but especially the University of Surrey and the Institute for the Development of Human Potential [IDHP].

If, shorn of the richness of daily life, this presentation of facilitation styles seems very abstracted, treat it as a quiz rather than a seminar. If you work with groups and teams you almost certainly do most these styles of facilitation—the point of defining the range of styles in this way is to become more aware of what we over-use and what we never, or rarely use, and how that skews the work we do.

For example, in my early days of training as a facilitator, I assessed myself as capable of confronting, only to find ten minutes later when role-playing a difficult workplace confrontation, that I became literally speechless. I later found, as do many people, that I was also pretty unskilled in facilitating catharsis.

None of the styles shown on the following screens should be regarded as better than any other. Facilitation is an enabling style of leadership. It presumes that, given the opportunity, people will be responsible, creative and self-directing. However, situations such as emergencies, need a rapid, highly directive leadership response. Others, such as merging two departments of a company or helping a family that is separating, may involve moving through all of these styles. Whatever the circumstances, facilitation emphasizes two things: accurately matching the style of facilitation to the individual's or the group's needs; and whether it's a family, professional, or business situation, persistently paying attention to the process of what is being done.

[more](#)

Facilitation styles

The following screens present an overview of the range of strategies that a facilitative approach to working with groups, teams and clients is likely to use. Use it to assess your own or other people's styles of leadership, which styles do you tend to use and which do you avoid?

[more](#)

Facilitation styles

This and the following screens present an overview of the range of strategies that a facilitative approach to working with groups, teams and clients is likely to use. Use it to assess your own or other people's styles of leadership. Which styles do you tend to use and which do you avoid?

Directive

The facilitator takes responsibility for how the group sets about its work.

[more](#)

Non-directive

The facilitator delegates responsibility for devising group work methods.

Facilitation styles

This and the following screens present an overview of the range of strategies that a facilitative approach to working with groups, teams and clients is likely to use. Use it to assess your own or other people's styles of leadership. Which styles do you tend to use and which do you avoid?

[more](#)**Interpretive**

The facilitator comes up with explanations to account for group behaviour.

Non-interpretive

The facilitator may do no more than point to elements of the group's behaviour.

Facilitation styles

This and the following screens present an overview of the range of strategies that a facilitative approach to working with groups, teams and clients is likely to use. Use it to assess your own or other people's styles of leadership. Which styles do you tend to use and which do you avoid?

[more](#)**Confronting**

The facilitator lovingly challenges any distressed behaviour.

Non-confronting

The facilitator creates a climate in which members can confront themselves.

Facilitation styles

This and the following screens present an overview of the range of strategies that a facilitative approach to working with groups, teams and clients is likely to use. Use it to assess your own or other people's styles of leadership. Which styles do you tend to use and which do you avoid?

[more](#)**Releasing or cathartic**

The facilitator works to resolve distress through laughter, tears, sobbing, shaking or storming.

Non-cathartic

The facilitator encourages tension release without catharsis.

Facilitation styles

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[more](#)

Structuring

The facilitator determines the variety and kinds of group activities.

Non-structuring

The facilitator does not get involved in deciding the group activities.

Facilitation styles

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[more](#)

Non-disclosing

The facilitator remains silent about her or his feelings about what happens in the group.

Disclosing

The facilitator shares her or his feelings about what happens in the group.

[more](#)

The skilled facilitator

A good facilitator is someone who can move freely between different working styles and activities. But above all, a facilitator of quality is one who has a new paradigm of mind already installed—someone who, to some extent already embodies the new paradigm.

How can you recognize one? Look for the quality and aroma of freshly baked bread—a signal that their facilitative skills are being baked afresh each day of her or his life.

Facilitation styles

This screen presents an overview of the range of facilitation strategies available to a new paradigm of mind. It is also a useful guide for assessing your own or other people's styles of leadership. If you have a leadership role, which styles do you tend to use and which do you avoid?

Directive

The facilitator takes responsibility for how the group sets about its work.

Interpretive

The facilitator comes up with explanations to account for group behaviour.

Confronting

The facilitator lovingly challenges any distressed behaviour.

Releasing or cathartic

The facilitator works to resolve distress through laughter, tears, sobbing, shaking or storming.

Structuring

The facilitator determines the variety and kinds of group activities.

Disclosing

The facilitator shares her or his feelings about what happens in the group.

Non-disclosing

The facilitator remains silent about her or his feelings about what happens in the group.

Non-structuring

The facilitator does not get involved in deciding the group activities.

Non-cathartic

The facilitator encourages tension release without catharsis.

Non-confronting

The facilitator creates a climate in which members can confront themselves.

Non-interpretive

The facilitator may do no more than point to elements of the group's behaviour.

Non-directive

The facilitator delegates responsibility for devising group work methods.

[See also ▾](#)

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