Using the Group Facilitation Process to Address Conflict

What is Group Facilitation?
A process managed by a neutral third person to help a group increase its effectiveness by improving the way it solves problems or makes decisions.

What sorts of assignments might Facilitators handle in CORE PLUS?
Group Facilitation may be used when more than a few people need to be part of the solution. Depending on the situation a Group Facilitation may involve:

- Team-building sessions
- Meetings to clarify or negotiate team roles and responsibilities
- Problem-solving meetings
- Meetings to share feedback and improve performance
- Team discussions to improve communication

When is a Facilitator needed?

- Too many participants for a mediation
- Discussion requires full participation of members
- Group trust levels are low and/or emotions are high
- Sensitive or political issues need to be raised
- Dealing with complex issues
- People don’t know how to proceed in discussing and/or resolving the issues
- The group is at an impasse or has a history of ineffective communication

Facilitators manage conflict by:

- Facilitators support participants in identifying their goals and developing their own action plans
- Helping parties to resolve issues using a cooperative problem-solving approach
• Asking the “right” questions
• Adjusting the facilitation process as needed -- depending on the discussion
• Identifying and testing assumptions
• Collecting and synthesizing ideas from all participants
• Providing summaries
• Developing practical action plans and execution measurements

THE HOW TO’S

Group Facilitation Tools

Managing group memory tools like flipcharts and computer notes.

Visioning, sequential questioning, brainstorming, idea building, force-field analysis, multi-voting, root cause analysis, decision grids, troubleshooting, systematic problem solving, café walk, and many more.

For more information on Group Facilitation tools see: “Facilitating with Ease! Core Skills for Facilitators, Team Leaders and Members, Managers, Consultants, and Trainers” by Ingrid Bens, 2005

What are the stages in conducting a Group Facilitation?

1. Assessment and meeting design – meet with client to understand requirements/issues; this stage can include conducting a climate assessment
2. Feedback on and refinement of design – provide meeting agenda to sponsor
3. Final pre-meeting preparation – logistics and communication for session
4. Starting a facilitation – introduction, overview of process and meeting norms
5. During the facilitation – discuss issues and possible solutions
6. Ending a facilitation – action plans and next steps
7. Following up on a facilitation – check-in with client/participants on how they thought session went

Reference: “Facilitating with Ease!” By Ingrid Bens
Situations where Group Facilitation can be helpful include:

- A group of scientists are not sharing information and resources with each other and this is adversely impacting the mission of the Lab. The Lab supervisor wants to be part of the discussion and needs someone else to lead the meeting.

- Staff supporting a National Park are in conflict over who gets to attend training, conduct travel, and take leave during the summer. The supervisor is seen as playing favorites. The supervisor has requested assistance working with the group to develop criteria, and an equitable system, for scheduling these events while still being able to cover critical functions.

- A new project manager (PM) doesn’t understand several administrative processes that are getting in the way of him/her effectively managing the project. The processes aren’t documented, the rules seem to keep changing, and the PM feels she/he is getting the run-around. The PM wants someone to facilitate a problem solving discussion with the Administrative Office.

- Senior Staff at a Center keep covering the same ground on problems that just don’t go away. Members are getting frustrated with each other; pointing fingers on who’s fault it is that nothing is getting done. The Director has had enough and wants a neutral person to help the group develop and execute an action plan.

- You are conducting a mediation for two people in conflict. During the mediation it becomes apparent that there are larger group issues that also impact the situation and the two in conflict can’t resolve these issues alone; follow-on group facilitation may be needed.

Reference: “Facilitating with Ease!” By Ingrid Bens