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THE PERSONAL APPROACH TO PUT THEORY INTO PRACTICE

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Personal traits and techniques of facilitators enable theory to affect practice. Facilitators are guides working within the ethos of the situation to reduce stresses, open the minds of participants, and clear the paths of communication to find what can be accomplished instead of preserving the status quo of what cannot be accomplished. Facilitators should leave their biases at the door and help others to do the same, except for upholding two considerations: 1) the integrity of resources in question; and 2) the dignity of persons who question. Abilities to do the right job are as important as doing the job right, and the two considerations should not be confused.

Issues are sources of conflicts, and conflicts are based on fears, facts, emotions, insights, motivations (hierarchy of needs from physiology to self esteem), and diverse perceptions and perspectives by participants. The stakeholders and publics associated with issues come to the table with different personal and cultural histories, goals and objectives, coping and defense mechanisms, abilities to learn and communicate, and willingness to participate (Table 1).

Facilitators must be compassionate and provide the proper physical and intellectual environment to deal with issues. Techniques exist to bring persons together, to plan ahead, to record inputs, to analyze issues, and to avoid

conflicts or to seek resolution to conflicts. Facilitators should learn the various techniques and when to apply them effectively. Caution! Techniques can be acceptable mechanistic rubrics that support intellectual theory, yet ineffective in application if not facilitated with a personal approach. Acceptable personal traits of facilitators (Table 2) are based on theory and practice, and they can be learned, but much of the success of working with people comes from the art of applying principles in ways that the techniques are not evident and the place of the facilitator is not dominant. Perhaps good personal traits for facilitation demonstrate wisdom not knowledge, reality not theory, helper rather than expert, and catalyst as opposed to teacher.

CONCLUSION

Facilitation starts with a belief in all participants and trust in their power to resolve conflicts. Facilitators demonstrate, through their personal skills, the needs to have empathy for each other, to listen, to use words appropriately, to question, and to be questioned. Participants must reach resolution! Facilitators create the safe atmosphere that enables the process to proceed with dignity.

Table 1. Common personality traits and thinking styles that lead to communication barriers.

Optimists see the good, the possible, the light.

Pessimists see the bad, the failures, and the darkness.

Random thinkers can get thoughts from everywhere and still integrate them.

Linear thinkers get ideas that must come one after the other like fence posts.

Abstract thinking allows thoughts to reach beyond what is seen, heard, touched, and smelled.

Concrete thinking needs the actual objects, events, or testimonials to be convinced.

Introverts are often alone going through life with self interests.

Extroverts mingle and discuss.

Fatalists are the "victims" who can't, and won't!

Exasperators are the center of attention and want control.

Appraisers seek facts and more facts, but still may not make decisions.

Relators are concerned with what others think and change their minds.

Piece thinkers see the smallest parts of issues or the universe.

System thinkers see the whole.

Table 2. The following personal traits help facilitators to implement the process smoothly.

- Create a safe place to build common bonds through good communication.
- Listen—the only way to know what is needed for success!
- Rubrics of facilitation are not the goal—outcomes are!
- Skillfully apply techniques without fanfare.
- Listen—how is the process developing?
- Know when to change techniques by “reading the audience.”
- Words are the manifestations of thoughts—positive and negative—seek clarification and understanding.
- Use simple rather than complex words.
- Be silent to promote communications.
- Don’t always feel the need to direct, control, and intervene.
- Encourage listening—not listening invalidates the feelings—the existence—of other persons.
- Instill empathy for identification with participants’ thoughts.
- Provide common experiences and frame of reference.
- Use clear communications.
- Clarify abstractions.
- Help to transfer experiences from one situation to another.
- Get participants into the field where the questions and answers can be found!